



**THE ISLE OF
VANISHING MEN**



*‘Chumey!’ From their manner it is evident that we are *de trop**

THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

A NARRATIVE OF
ADVENTURE IN
CANNIBAL-LAND

BY
W. F. ALDER

ILLUSTRATED WITH PHOTOGRAPHS
BY THE AUTHOR



NEW YORK
THE CENTURY CO.

1922

Copyright, 1922, by
THE CENTURY CO.

PRINTED IN U. S. A.

TO
MY WIFE

110788

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I	WE LEAVE AMBON	3
II	THE PARADISE-HUNTER	13
III	THE KAMPONG	32
IV	THE ASSISTANT AND THE NAUTILUS	45
V	WE'RE OFF!	53
VI	SHIPWRECKED AMONG CANNIBALS	67
VII	WE ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS	85
VIII	WE TAKE UP QUARTERS IN THE KAMPONG	97
IX	THE STORY OF THE SWISS SCIENTIST	116
X	OUR CONSOLATION PRIZE	129
XI	THE FEAST	140
XII	THE HEAD DANCE	148
XIII	A KANGAROO HUNT	160
XIV	THE BIRD OF PARADISE	167
XV	THE COMING OF THE BURONG MAS	173

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

" <i>Uhuman.</i> " From their manner it is evident that we are <i>de trop</i>	<i>Frontispiece</i>
	FACING PAGE
Malays bringing on board their varied possessions	16
As the last of the <i>praus</i> was cleared of baggage they clustered on the gangway, shouting adieus	16
The prison-yard in Merauke, New Guinea	24
Each of the men has perforated the septum of his nose to permit inserting a pair of boar-tusks	33
A pair of alligator-teeth make a wonderful nose- ornament	33
Enormous nose-tubes of bamboo which entirely close the nostrils, making breathing possible only through the mouth	36
The women wear in many cases a tiny breech-clout but no other covering	36
A long platform which entirely encircles the kam- pong	45
During the day the men occupy the sleeping- benches, while the women sit upon the sandy floor of the shacks	45
Seated at a discreet distance, watching our camp- making intently	80
There had been a disagreement in the village	80

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
Those who failed to get a package come to the dead-line and asked for one	85
They may be friendly at one moment and turn upon one the very next	85
We made presents of tin jewelry to the natives, but what they wanted was tobacco	92
Feathered head-dresses moving through the tall grass told us of the natives watching our progress toward the kampong	92
Twice we encounter stalwart warriors standing like sentinels, as though disdainful of concealment .	97
The body is placed in a sitting position after being gaily decorated for the funeral	97
The native climbs a cocoanut-palm in a series of humps and stretches, like a giant inch-worm .	100
Making fire. A piece of hard wood is rotated by hand while in contact with a softer piece . .	100
One little fellow takes great delight in hearing his mother describe the battles in which his father collected his trophies	109
After the heat of midday the men gather in the shade to discuss the latest scandal or politics .	109
Eating mud! That's it, just plain dried mud . .	112
"Little Playmate" re-adjusts his nose-tubes . .	112
The hairdresser plaits long strands of raffia into the kinky wool of the Kia Kias	116
The shiny inner surface of a Malay tobacco-box serves them as a mirror	116
The deserted Jesuit mission which formerly was the pride and hope of its unfortunate builder . .	125

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
In the early evening the women sit around on the copra-drying-platforms and watch the sunset .	125
They are very proud of the scar-patterns . . .	129
The weals caused by the infection of the cuts some- times stand out nearly an inch from the sur- rounding flesh	129
The men occupy their time with revision of their toilets, rather than in doing the chores . . .	133
Sarah	133
The <i>kapala kampong</i> presents us with human skulls, the highest token of their esteem	136
A young and very fearsome Kia Kia spends a great deal of his time with her	136
The circle breaks up and a dance takes place for our entertainment	140
They sang for us at the top of their leather lungs .	140
Long into the night the mad festival continues. To exert themselves in any productive occupa- tion to a like extent would kill them . . .	144
The drums are tuned in a peculiar manner. Having no strings fastened to the heads with which to tighten them, they place small lumps of resin mixed with clay on the heads to produce the desired sound	144
The Head Dance. Two girls begin it by slowly walking up and down in the center of the circle of onlookers	148
The Dutch officials punish them severely for indulg- ing in these practices	148
Under the influence of the wady, exhilarated by the wild dance, the men finally take part . . .	157

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
They again threaten the men with total exclusion from all intercourse with their families . . .	157
This man confessed to having eaten many human beings. To accurately estimate the number was beyond his power of reckoning	161
The sharp-edged stone war-club in the hands of such men as these makes quick work of a victim	161
The skipper is a jolly fellow with a countenance that beams good nature, mixed with a shrewd- ness that speaks of business ability	176
He beats a gong briskly and chants a prayer in Malay. while the rest of the crew add their prayers to his petitions	176

THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

CHAPTER I

WE LEAVE AMBON

TWO bells tinkles within the master's cabin, and the quartermaster on the bridge repeats the announcement of nine o'clock with two strokes upon the bronze bell near his station at the wheel. It is sailing-time. The townspeople have turned out en masse to bid us farewell, and the open spaces on the new concrete wharf are ablaze with color. The chatter of a thousand voices comes to us as we stand upon the deck looking down on the scene. Every one seems happy. The great whistle on the ship's funnel, after a preliminary gargling of its throat, shatters the tranquil air with a peremptory warning. The screw churns up a maelstrom beneath the overhanging stern, and we swing out into the channel amid a storm of adieus spoken in a

4 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

dozen tongues. We are off for the land of the cannibal Kia Kias,—the Isle of Vanishing Men.

As the ship gathers way, Amboina, spice-scented "Ambon," drops into the mists of the morning and we look around the deck for company. We are alone. Then we remember the information given us by the First Officer yesterday. We are the only first-cabin passengers on board, this trip. Few people find their way to the Isle of Vanishing Men. It offers little to the business man. The commercial traveler never goes there. Merauke, our destination, has but five white inhabitants, and their wants are few. One steamer a month carries to them the things they need and the mail from home.

We shall spend our time for the next few days in lazy languor, playing an occasional game of chess with the chief engineer, chatting now and then with the very amiable captain, or, as one learns to do in the Indies, just draping ourselves over most comfortable steamer chairs and day-dreaming for hours on end. The air is like silk. The piping falsetto of the deck-hands as they sing at their work lulls one into reverie, and life

glides by with a smoothness that takes no count of time.

There comes the day when the captain greets us at breakfast with the news that we shall arrive this evening. As he selects from the heaped platter of sliced sausage his favorite variety he tells us that we shall sight land at one this afternoon. We are agog with excitement. The cannibals are not far away now. We ply him with questions and as he spreads his bread with marmalade he tells us of the *Kia Kias* and what their name means. To be *kikied*, he avers, is to be eaten; the natives are eaters of men; hence the name.

He regales us with reminiscences of his former visits to the island and roars with merriment as he relates how on one voyage a few months ago he was accompanied by his wife. The natives thronged the little wharf, clad in their birthday suits, to witness the arrival of the ship. Some of them were allowed on board, where they were awed by the marvels of the white man's great proa. The captain's wife was

6 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

the first white woman they had ever seen, and one of the natives—a son of a chief, by the way,—became enamored of her. He immediately offered the captain two fine pigs for her. The captain refused the offer, saying it was not enough. The man withdrew, his brow wrinkled with deep thought. He left the ship and was lost in the throng that strained the underpinning of the little wharf. Two hours later he returned, accompanied by several of his friends. Each of these carried a pig trussed up with rattan hobbles. He had sold his wife and three daughters for five pigs and was raising his ante, so the captain's story ran, and was much put out when he learned that the price offered was still inadequate.

The lady in question was the object of so much attention from the well-meaning if somewhat amorous natives that she found it expedient to retire to the privacy of her husband's cabin, whence she was able unseen to observe the visitors.

The little saloon in which we breakfast over-

looks the main deck and the men there are making ready the winches and rigging preparatory to the unloading of cargo manifested for Merauke. Their work interrupts the captain in his narrative, for the rumbling remonstrances of the rusty machines make the morning hideous. We hasten to the upper deck, where after doing our customary half-mile constitutional we busy ourselves with the packing of our dunnage.

This will take us an hour and we look forward to a comfortable snooze before tiffin. By that time, or shortly after, the coast-line of New Guinea will have risen to view out of a murky horizon in the northeast. There is nothing to do until then. Our letters to those at home will not be written until the very last moment before the steamer sails, for we shall want to describe Merauke in them. It will be two months before the steamer calls again. In those two months we shall have visited the tribes living far from the little trading-station of Merauke and its very friendly population of five whites, many Chi-

8 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

nese, a few Malays, and a hundred or so Kia Kias. The missionaries have brought these last from the interior and they live outside the town in kampongs or villages, the nearest of which is an hour's walk from the dock.

The chief engineer—who, by the way, is a real character and something of a philosopher—disarranges our plans for forty winks. He has spent about forty-three years on the ships that ply the waters of the Indies, and has many tales to tell; for he loves to relive his earlier days, when the native girls were more beautiful to him than now. With the onmarch of years the enervating climate and the demoralizing life of the kampongs have exacted a toll, and the overdrafts he made in those never-to-be-forgotten times have been collected in full by the Bank of Nature.

The old roué boasts of his conquests among the golden-skinned *vahines* of the Southern Islands and tells us now with shocking candor of the doubtful virtues of Nasia, an old flame of his who lived in Ambon. He sees her now

and then in Saparoea, where she is the reputable wife of a half-caste government employee. To the native, marriage means that respectable status which permits of clandestine meetings with the wife, censured only by the husband. All others aid and abet the liaison, for does it not furnish delightful gossip in an otherwise somnolent community? He tells of a night when he and his chief (he was second engineer then) went in company with some others to a kampong back of Dobo in the Arus and proceeded to kiss all the girls in sight. The girls must have taken kindly to the demonstration, for they unearthed "square-face" gin in plenty and with dances and what not regaled the white *Tuans* (masters) until the east turned from violet to rose.

We cannot find it in our hearts to censure the chief, for the "custom of the country" has made its insidious way deep into his soul and has warped his point of view. One has to spend much time in the Indies fully to appreciate how this can be. Here life is stripped of many

10 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

superfluities and conventions and love of life and of love become paramount factors. He shakes his head at what he calls our "Long Hair" ideas and tells us we should have brought with us two girls from Ambon, to keep house for us while we are in New Guinea. The Ambonese girls, he tells us, are much more comely than the Kia Kia girls.

"Wait till you see Reache's girl in Merauke," he says; "or the Contrôleur's up the coast,—Nona is her name. She came from Ambon. She is nineteen and as saucy a little trinket as you'd ever want to see." Thereupon the chief laughs immoderately.

Seeking further information on the subject, we question him regarding certain eventualities had we made "temporary" matrimonial arrangements such as he recommends, and he waves a deprecating hand at us.

"Don't worry about that," he says. "When you get ready to leave 'em give 'em a new sarong, a little money, a ticket home, and they'll bless you forever and maybe cry a little into the

bargain because they hate to lose a good thing. In a week or two, though, they will be deep in a new affair and they'll forget. Don't let them fall in love, though, or they might get nasty. Best way is to tell 'em you're going about ten minutes before you leave. It saves a lot of powwow an' palaver. Otherwise it'll cost you twice as much to save your face."

The chiming of eight bells closes the engineer's dissertation, as he stands watch until four in the afternoon. He leaves us reluctantly, for he regards us as babes in the woods who need much assistance and advice in this very interesting but usually taboo subject. Mayhap he is right, but, as the Englishman says, "We'll muddle through somehow." Somehow we can't quite divest ourselves of our "old-fashioned" ideas.

While we talk over the chief's code of morals, we wonder about many things. The sort of life he has led has been led by many white men, for four hundred years, in the Indies and every one seems happy and contented. True, there are

12 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

many brown-skinned people with blue eyes and just as many fair-skinned ones with warm, dancing eyes of sloe black, but on the lips of each and every one of these there is a smile. They seem to know no trouble. The warm air makes us drowsy. Tiffin is n't till one-thirty: why not take that snooze we planned for?

CHAPTER II

THE PARADISE-HUNTER

IT is four o'clock in the afternoon. The ship's launch is wallowing toward the wharf, carrying with it ourselves and two of the ship's officers. Moh—our Javanese boy, cook, major-domo, and general nuisance—is busily engaged in gathering our *barang* together, preparatory to getting it ashore. No one ever thinks of calling baggage anything but “barang” after a few months in Malay waters. We just must show our command of the vernacular and thereby escape classification as common tourists.

As we near the wharf a motley crowd greets us with a variety of expressions. The throng is composed for the most part of Malay-speaking Javanese or Ambonese, but here and there one sees pajama-clad Chinese and over there near the godown, or warehouse, is the white-clad

14 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

figure of a white man. He is approaching us rapidly. We scramble up the rickety, slippery stairway to the dock and find ourselves in a chattering gang who clamor to be allowed to carry our barang to the *passangrahan* or rest-house, which in these Dutch possessions is the only shelter available to the stranger. It is maintained by the Government for this purpose and in it one finds every convenience, but one must supply one's own servants and food.

We arrange with a Chinaman, who seems to be a sort of "straw boss" of the coolies, for the transfer of our luggage, and dismiss the matter from our minds. He will care for it and will not worry us, for the whole bill will not be over two guilders, or about sixty cents. There are twenty-two pieces to be moved. If we cared to argue the matter out we might get the job done for one guilder, but it's too warm for an argument.

The white-clad figure is close to us now. He evidently is worried about the arrival of something or other that he expects the boat to bring

him. He does not notice us, but goes directly to the ship's officer who is giving orders to the men lightering the cargo ashore. They engage in an animated but good-natured conversation. Farther down the dock a scuffle is taking place. The crowd thins out rapidly, and we can glimpse the combatants now and then between the intervening onlookers. They are slashing at each other with knives and whole-souled abandon. They are Malay stevedores. From the lower end of the mole a grotesque native policeman spies the affray and shouts to the battlers to desist,—this with wild waving of his arms and dire threats of punishment. His shrill admonitions do not seem to have the desired effect, and he suddenly projects himself (that is the only word for it) in the general direction of the mêlée. His old navy cutlass flashes in the waning sunlight as he draws it with a great flourish and comes bouncing down the wharf. The scabbard disconcertingly inserts itself between his legs and he performs an absurd contortion to regain his footing. By miraculous intervention of Prov-

16 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

idence he maintains his footing and arrives. *Smack! smack!* and the belligerents depart in opposite directions. The policeman's cutlass has accomplished its purpose. The fighters have been spanked into peace with the flat of the blade.

As the pair separate a gentle voice beside us is raised in soft-toned remonstrance. It is directed toward the misguided policeman. "Gad, man!" it says, "don't stop 'em; let 'em fight." Then turning to us, the speaker continues, "I just love to see the blood fly." Our jaws drop. We turn to scan the ferocious one and look him over in amazement. Before us is a little man of somewhat uncertain age, cladly largely in a huge Vandyke that rambles in a casual fashion over his face. His voice is soft, soft as a girl's, and his eyes as we look into them lose their blood-thirsty, anticipatory glint, and sparkle with kindliness and good-fellowship.

He extends his hand, a hand wrinkled and seamed like a last-year's apple and brown as a *claro* from Sumatra. "My moniker's Reache,"



Malays bringing on board their varied possessions



As the last of the *praus* was cleared of baggage they clustered on the gangway, shouting adieus

he tells us, and we tell him our names. He continues: "You are Americans, eh? Well, put 'er there! I like the way you fellows handled the railroad situation in France. Here for long? Wait: stay here a moment while I see the mate there, and I'll take you over to the club for a drink. We'll spin a yarn and get acquainted. Can't spin a yarn or get chummy sudden, 'less there's some square-face in sight; that's solid. Back in a minute."

As we watch him go we smile. So there is a club in Merauke! Five white men,—and a club! It is proper. Where there is a club there must be a bar. The barkeeper draws a salary, after a fashion. He must be kept awake to lend an air of liveliness to the institution, so the members foregather of an evening and sing raucously in the wee sma' hours expressly for that purpose. True, the club is but a palm-thatched edifice with a slightly corrugated floor and reputation; nevertheless it is a club. Nondescript furniture ungraces its airy spaciousness and mud-wasps' nests now and then fall upon one's head as some

18 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

fly-hungry chick chack lizard carelessly dislodges them, but it is still "The Club." It being "The Club," one must always remember to wear his coat therein, for the etiquette of fleshpots is brought to this land of the stewpots and observed with due reverence. No matter how deep in his cups the superior white man may be, he must never appear at "The Club" in negligée. It is n't done.

The native may wander in the simmering heat of midday clad in what approximates nothing, but the Tuan, being superior even when most satisfyingly inebriated, to maintain his proper dignity must wear at all times a coat over his regulation soft-collared shirt. Of course we Americans are not really bound to do this, for our many eccentricities are passed over without undue comment. When one of those who really "belong" does make some allusion to one of our—what shall I say?—indecorums, one of his fellows offers the all-sufficient excuse or explanation, "Oh, he's American." This always suffices; and, too, it is said as though the speaker

expected as much and would have been disappointed otherwise. And despite all this they like us. They really like our devil-may-care expediency, and I think secretly envy us. In this they "have nothing on us," though, for it seems to be a human tendency to envy something in the other fellow.

Reache joins us in a few moments, and we are soon ensconced in rather rickety chairs on the veranda of the club. Between tumblerfuls of square-face gin and long draws at an excellent Dutch cigar, he entertains us with tales of bird-of-paradise hunting, which avocation he follows somewhat successfully. He now and then makes our flesh creep with a particularly hair-raising recital delivered somewhat in this fashion:

"You fellows know, I guess, what I'm here for. It's paradise. Not the country, no! The country is hell and no mistake, but the birds,—that is what I go after, and get, too. I outfitted in Moresby and when I got my hunters together and plenty of petrol for the launch I headed for the upper Diegul. It's way up in the interior

20 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

where we get the best birds. It's bad country up there, and no mistake, for the natives have a little habit of lunching off one another when pig becomes scarce. The governor warned me that I was taking my life in my hands, but I don't know any one else's hands I'd rather have it in, so I went inside. My crew of hunters was as ripe a gang of cutthroats as one would wish to see and they tried cutting a few didoes among themselves, but after I'd knocked a couple of them cold they took to behaving and I let things go at that.

"You want a gang like that for hard going. They're necessary. The only way to keep them happy is to give them plenty of work or, what they like best, plenty of scrapping. Then they have n't time to brood over differences of opinion amongst themselves. I loaded a couple of bushels of shells like that nigger out there has on. They wear them for pants. One shell and Mr. Cannibal is all dressed up. Well, I use those shells for currency. One first-class shell which costs me about ten cents Dutch money buys a

bird-of-paradise skin that is worth twelve hundred guilders a cody,—that is, twenty skins,—or, as it figures out in real money, forty dollars a skin. It's a fair margin of profit." Here Reache grins and absorbs another tumblerful of square-face.

"Well," he continues, "we went inside,—I, seven shooters, and some other Moresby boys for packers. Soon we had all the shooting and trading we wanted. Everything went all right for a time and there was no trouble with the natives. I gave them one nice shiny shell for one prime skin and they were as pleased as possible. The trouble started over some fool thing that one of my boys said or did to one of the native women and soon matters began to tense up a little. There was a Chinese outfit inside, too, that were doing some trading and they tried to take advantage of the natives. They gummed the game that season. The natives stood for the Chinamen for a time, but pretty soon the old women of the tribe called all the younger women and girls aside and told them that the men were taboo till

22 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

the Chinamen were put out of the way, and as usual the younger ones agreed to what the old women said. (They always have their way.) One fine evening the Kia Kias had a little dinner-party to celebrate the resumption of domestic felicity attendant upon the demise of the Chinese.

"The Chinamen were the guests of honor. They had been roasted to a turn. Next day I visited the place and when I saw the kampong clearing I knew what had happened. This piece of jade was the only thing left of the Chinamen that I could see. The rest was eaten. I took this from one of the children, who was playing with it. My gang were pretty sore about it. I don't think it was on account of the Chinese, particularly, but because they had missed a good scrap, and they began to grouch. The next day one of the natives came to the launch with a couple of skins. Ula was working on the engine. The rest of my gang were all away in the jungle, shooting. The skins were a little ruffled up, but I think what made Ula angry

was the fact that the native had on a pair of Chinese trousers.

He never collected for the skins, for Ula picked up a spanner that he'd been working on the engine with and tapped him with it. Then he tossed him into the *kalee* alongside to drift down the stream for the crocodiles to dine on.

"The other natives all cleared out and that night we heard them singing and beating drums in the jungle near their kampong. There was trouble in the air. My boys began to rifle the barang for some heavier shells and a couple of them built a big fire in the center of our clearing. About ten in the evening one of them had walked out across the circle of the firelight to throw on some more wood, when he stopped, straightened up, and then collapsed in a heap.

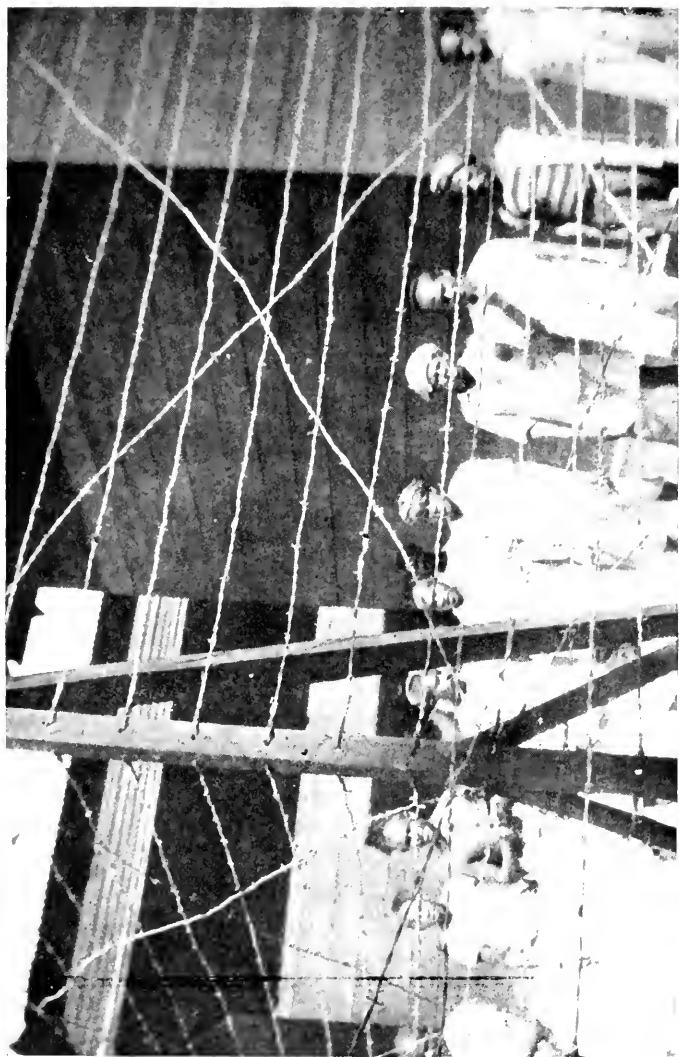
"I jumped for my gun. A Kia Kia ten-foot spear had finished him. A minute later hell broke loose. The natives did a queer thing for them. They rushed us. Man, it was a beautiful fight! There was a sick sort of a moon trying to see what was going on and the fire gave us

24 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

a little light, so we just lined up along the bank of the kalee and let them come. Ula was a bird of a fighter. I've never seen more methodical slaughter. He and I were lying a little apart from the rest and as each bunch of howling painted devils came for us across the clearing we would let them have it.

"They shot clouds of arrows at us, but as we were lying down in the tall grass they all went high, though some of them whizzed by uncomfortably close. When they ran out of arrows they came at us with stone-headed clubs and we'd let them have what was in our twelve-gages at thirty feet. It was *bang! bang! bang!* along the bank of that kalee, like a clay-pigeon trap match.

"Before long I noticed that things were pretty quiet over to my left where the rest of my boys were, and I rose up to look. As I did so I heard Ula grunt, "Look out!" and I swung around just in time to stop a burly Kia Kia who was planning to do me with a stone club that would have killed an elephant. Then Ula went down.



The prison-yard in Meranke, New Guinea

They were coming at me from both sides, for I could see the grass moving slowly where they were sneaking up on me. I reached into my pocket to get some more shells and got the shock of my life. I had shot my last one. My gun was empty. There was nothing to do but get away, and I turned toward the spot on the bank where the launch was tied. I had taken maybe a dozen steps toward it when I heard a couple of plumps from the engine and then she caught on and got to hitting regular.

"I rose up from the shelter of the tapa grass and made time toward the sound. Ammed, the only one of the boys left, had started the kicker and was pulling out. He saved my bacon that night. We did n't waste any time in getting down the river,—just kept going."

Reache turns and shakes his head. While his hand gropes for the bottle of square-face he sighs and concludes, "I lost some fine guns that night." We look at each other in speculation. The story sounds all right, but— "Ah, here he comes!" exclaims Reache. "Here comes the Controllleur."

26 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

Reache rises and goes to the railing of the veranda and calls to a brown-skinned, black mustached, military-looking fellow. After a moment's conversation the Controlleur comes in with Reache, greets us cordially, and tells us that he has the passangrahan ready for us.

The Resident in Ambon has sent a letter by our steamer, telling of our coming, and has ordered things done for us. It is the way these kindly Dutch officials always treat the visitor. The Controlleur informs us—much to his embarrassment, however—that there is a government charge of what equals thirty-four cents a day for our accommodation. Much as he regrets it, he says, there are no exceptions to this rule. We drown his embarrassment with a liberal libation of Reache's square-face and, escorted by both of our new friends, go to inspect our quarters. We shall be here in Merauke several days before proceeding up the coast, so we must be very comfortable, they say.

As we near the passangrahan we take note of a group of sheet-iron buildings surrounded by a

high wire fence. It is the jail and watching us intently are a score of prisoners. As we look in their direction they break into smiles and call to us in Malay. They are asking us to secure them for additional servants during our stay and, noting our surprise at this, the Controlleur assures us that he will loan us all the help we want. Later he makes good his word, for he sends several of the prisoners over to the rest-house where we have taken up our abode. They are accompanied by a native sergeant, who sits in the shade all day, smoking. He never bothers about what the prisoners are doing and they dutifully report to him at meal-times. In the evening, when their house-cleaning and grass-cutting are over, they line up and return to the jail. We even send them on errands, which they do conscientiously but not at all hastily.

The Controlleur and Reache leave us—to get our things straightened out, they say—and promise to call again to-morrow. They also say that we must meet the other Europeans who are connected with the little trading-company.

28 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

We shall not be able to see the Assistant Resident on business until the steamer sails, we are informed, for he has many reports to forward to his chief in Ambon. These are always made up at the last moment and the rush is terrible. The assistant is even now writing the first of the two. One of them is to tell the chief that Merauke is still in New Guinea, and the other that we have arrived and are being well cared for. He must rest from this labor for a day; then he will receive us with the formality due the distinguished guest. He will inquire with solicitous concern as to our health, and what we most desire to do, and will grant our every wish, after due deliberation. Things of such weighty nature as our coming on a little friendly visit must be treated with painstaking consideration. It is too warm to decide too much in one day, for then judgment might be erroneous, and—oh, well! why talk business when there is so much else to talk about? There has n't been a stranger in Merauke for months, and we can't blame them, can we? No! We shall let the purpose of our coming go hang, and

just sit down and be entertained for the best part of a week. They will enjoy it almost as much as we, so why not?

At the passangrahan we find that Moh has dinner ready. He shows us where the bath-house is and we go there and revel in the cool splashing of the water upon our perspiring bodies. The mode of bathing, here, is new to us, but we feel we shall come to like it. The bath-house is exactly like all others found throughout the Dutch East Indies. It is placed right alongside the cook-house, which is detached from the main bungalow, that the heat and smell of cooking may not invade the domain of the Tuan.

Within the palm-thatched room are several great jars of rain-water, a wooden grid to stand upon, and a tin dipper of gallon size. One drenches himself from head to foot, lathers thoroughly, then sluices down with more gallons and the bath is complete. It is quick, easy, and exhilarating. We are told not to try it much after nightfall, however, unless we wish to be eaten alive. There are cannibalistic mosquitos here

30 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

that will charge en masse, drive in their lances, and bear you away in chunks. They are nocturnal in their habits and we are profoundly thankful that this is so, for at night one sleeps behind a protecting *klambu* or mosquito curtain which completely enshrouds the bed. There one falls into slumber secure from their attacks and lulled by their incessant droning. Now and then some persistent fellow manages to find entrance and one becomes aware of a more shrill note in the general hum that increases in pitch until it is punctuated with a hesitant quaver followed by a red-hot stab,—upon almost any spot, but generally on the temple, where it accomplishes most. This is the occasion of two things. The first, a hunting-expedition with a lighted wax taper, which ends in the incineration of the intruder, and an angry determination to murder Moh the very next morning for leaving an opening in the folds of the net. Justly or unjustly, Moh always serves as scapegoat. He thrives on it.

Dinner over, we hunt up a tin cigar box to

serve as an ash-tray and take it to bed with us. It is too early to go to sleep and too mosquito-y, if I may use the term, to be up and around. In New Guinea one hides from these pests as soon as darkness falls. Moh, though he has a leather skin, builds a great smudge of cocoanut husks. The smoke of it makes him weep and gasp, but he persists in his friendly gossip with a man from Java lately come to Merauke, telling him the latest news and of his latest wife. The other listens with sparkling eyes and rapt attention to Moh's description.

CHAPTER III

THE KAMPONG

TO-DAY the assistant is resting. The steamer is gone. We shall go hunting adventure on our own. Four miles inland there is a kampong where live about fifty Kia Kias. As the day is warm we will put on the lightest clothing we have and go there. We cannot miss the way, for the only road of which the country boasts passes the place. It leads to a deceased missionary's little plantation about three miles farther on.

The last building we pass on our way through the outer fringes of the little town is a rambling whitewashed structure. It is the government hospital. We must see this place, for in it they are striving to save the Vanishing Men. We are met at the little office door by a nurse in



Each of the men has perforated the septum of his nose to permit inserting a pair of boar-tusks



A pair of alligator teeth make a wonderful nose-ornament

modest white. She is the only one on duty now, for nurses are hard to obtain in this out-of-the-way corner of our old footstool. She is half white and half Chinese. She speaks five languages fluently, we find, for as we converse with her she lapses into French now and then, with sprinklings of Malay and Dutch. It is a habit linguists have, for they find finer shades of meaning in varied tongues. Her English is perfect and we take for granted the purity of her Pekinese, for she tells us she was born in the Celestial Empire.

In the wards she shows us the patients in her care. Here we find the curse of civilization stalking like a grim specter. Statistics, she informs us, give the Kia Kias fourteen years more to live. Once the race numbered a hundred thousand, but now with the coming of the strangers the venereal scourge is upon them and their ill-nurtured bodies cannot withstand the heroic treatment necessary for successfully combating the disease. The mere confinement in the hospital kills some of them.

34 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

Before the coming of the strangers they were a healthy race that thrived and prospered. True, they ate one another, but their diet seemed to agree with them. It was the greatest pleasure they got out of life. These dinner-parties are taboo now and the poor devils within reach of the punishing whites have nothing for which to live. They are a race without ambition, lacking zest of life, and seek excitement in excesses that take toll of hundreds where the roasting-pit claimed but a comparative few. In early days there was tribal organization, which was necessary for survival. Now they live in less dread and great sloth, their idleness breeding indulgence in the only thing left to them, unrestricted sensuality. True, the tribes that live in the remote fastnesses of the jungle still maintain the old customs and they are contaminated only slightly with the scourge; still, it has found them.

With mixed emotions we leave the hospital. The advice of the engineer comes to us with new significance. Every ship or schooner that plies

the islands has been freighted with the scourge, gathered from the four winds and brought here. Then come the missionaries further to darken the sky, for do they not lift hands, eyes raised askance, at the naked savage and force him to don clothes? The childlike and untutored natives do not know that in rain-soaked clothing there lurks a menace. Their naked skins shed the water and they never become chilled, but those whom the missionaries have clothed are one and all subject to pulmonary troubles that are making further inroads on the race.

The road winds into the jungle where the silence is absolute. A mile from town it has dwindled to a mere foot-path. As we brush the close-growing shrubs that border it, we dislodge clouds of midges and mosquitos which, with the moist heat and the perspiration that soaks us, become intolerable. However, we have set out for the kampong, and shall go there.

After an interminable hour, we come to a clearing where we find a palm-thatched shack. Three naked children are sprawling on the

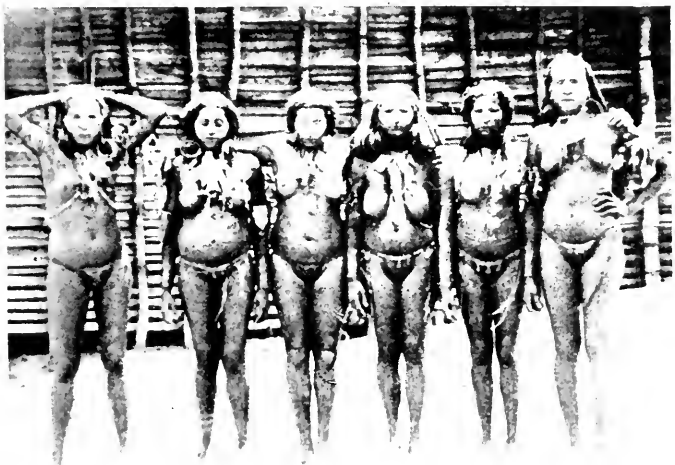
36 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

ground, chattering baby talk. They do not notice our approach until we are close to them, but as we say "hello" they bounce to their feet and disappear in the bush with wild cries of alarm. They are just like any of the wild things that live in the jungle. We laugh at their sudden fear and call to them to return, while their mother inside the shack peeps furtively at us through a crevice in the wall. Evidently she is not much frightened, for she comes to the door and greets us with, "*Tabe, Tuans,*" the stock greeting of the Malay-speaking native. She is clad in her birthday clothing, as naked as on her natal day save for a heavy necklace of shells wound twice around her neck. She approaches us with easy grace, wholly unconscious of her nudity. Though she wears no covering whatever, she is clothed, for the dignity with which she moves and her utter lack of self-consciousness form a garment that drapes her pleasingly.

Going to a pile of cocoanuts beside the shack, she selects two which she opens with a deft



Enormous nose-tubes of bamboo which entirely close the nostrils, making breathing possible only through the mouth



The women wear in many cases a tiny breech-clout, but no other covering

stroke of a heavy broad-bladed knife. These she gives us, with a smile and a sinuous, almost coquettish lifting of the hip as she stretches her arm to hand them to us. Bidding us wait, she disappears inside the shack, emerging in a moment with two Chinese enameled cups which she offers us. We thank her, but prefer to drink the cool water of the nuts from the shell.

The brown-skinned urchins, upon seeing their mother in friendly conversation with the strangers, return to the clearing and eye us with wonder and some distrust. They are on their little toes, so to speak, watching for the slightest suspicious movement, ready to fly to the protective jungle. Their big sloe eyes grow wistful as we offer them some pennies and their mother reassures them, finally overcoming their fears and bringing them to the place where we are crouched upon our haunches with hands outstretched. They reach out, snatch the pennies, and are gone, whereupon the mother shrieks with merriment. While we are laughing over the little comedy a boy of possibly eighteen

38 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

years, naked as his mother, comes from the thicket with some more cocoanuts, which he tosses on the pile by the shack. He looks inquiringly at us and his mother directs him to guide us to the kampong, which is set back off the path a few rods.

The sound of laughter and some one singing in full-voiced baritone greets us as we near the kampong. A man is singing a Kia Kia melody that sounds as though he were ill. He finishes the song as we enter the narrow opening in the kampong wall and all the natives in sight gaze at us for a fraction of a second, paralyzed with surprise and fright.

The spell is broken the moment we step inside and they leap en masse for the exit in the rear of the kampong and wedge there in a ludicrous struggle of arms and legs. Somehow they force their way through the opening and the enclosure is deserted except for a few old women too old to get away.

Our presence in the kampong is resented by the canine population, which gathers before us

in a semicircle and howls in great anguish of spirit. Soon a dusky form slithers in through the exit, to be followed by several more, and all stand grouped at a respectful distance, eyeing us closely. They are women, startlingly nude. As they come to no harm at our hands, the men take heart and return singly till all the inmates of the kampong are again at home. After a silent study of us the men evidently realize that we are harmless, for they break into loud laughter, which is taken up by the women, and come toward us to make us welcome. The women gather around and, though laughing uproariously, seem friendly enough.

We are in a real cannibal village, and, as it is our first, we are somewhat curious about it. We start in by examining the natives and note the curious decorations with which they adorn themselves. Each of the men has perforated the septum of his nose to permit of inserting a pair of boar tusks or pig knuckles. This of course interferes with his breathing, so he has cut two vertical openings through the sides of

40 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

the nose through which the air whistles at each inhalation. The faces of all the men are besmeared with paint, which they make from colored earths they gather and grind into a fine powder.

The ears of both men and women are perforated in the lower part of the lobes, which, by reason of the many heavy brass rings with which they are weighted, hang down well upon the neck, some of them even touching the shoulders. All wear necklaces of shell, with sometimes a variation in the shape of vari-colored seeds sewn upon pieces of trade cloth. The men wear no loin-cloth, but those of family wear a grotesquely inadequate substitute comprised of a shell and a string of bark fiber. The women in many cases wear a tiny breech-clout of twisted fiber scarcely bigger than the palm of one hand, a triangular patch that because of its color and texture does not seem to exist. Many of them seem to be sufficiently happy without even this pretense at clothing and in no way conscious of their nakedness. Among those

under the age of twenty of both sexes there is no attempt at covering.

We are as much objects of curiosity to them as they to us and while we have been studying them they have been picking us to pieces. The women pluck at our silk shirts and try to peep inside, doing it gently, however, for fear of arousing our anger. They are like a throng of curious, happy children and now and then one of the younger women will burst into shrieks of laughter at some sally of her mates and run a few steps away, where she leaps up and down in exuberance of spirits.

They move like graceful animals, each muscle rippling under its sheathing of dark bronze with a freedom and smoothness that makes us envy them their unrestrained ease. Here are no bloated abdomens, no pinched-in waists. They have never seen corsets. Their bodies and limbs are clean-lined and well rounded and they walk haughtily erect.

In response to our inquiries as to their shelters they extend us a laughing invitation to visit

them and lead us to the low thatched shelves that run around the enclosure, which forms their back wall. Supported upon low legs of bamboo is a long platform which completely encircles the kampong. There are no partitions of any kind to screen from view the various intimacies of family life. One may sit upon the platform and see whatever transpires in the homes of the entire kampong. In fact, these people live entirely on a community basis, and there are no secrets.

Johnny woos Milly, or whatever their names may be, with little regard for the others and may live with her for some time without censure before he finally decides that marriage is the proper thing. If he finds her to his liking he may inform the rest that he will keep her, and that is all there is to it. There is no scandal, for all know everything. Gossip there is in plenty, but that is when some member plays hookey and visits another kampong with too much regularity. Conduct of this sort is frowned upon, but not punished except by the hookee's—what shall

I call her?—sparring partner, who if she learns of the situation may take the offender to task. But such is life even in our own land of Wednesday evenings and cabarets.

Our hosts bring cocoanuts, which they open for us to drink from, and offer us food. We drink, but, strange to say, are not hungry. Our cigarettes are received with marked approval,—so marked, in fact, that they are snatched from us by the package the moment we pass out the first one. They take it for granted that we want them to have them and do not wish to put us to the trouble of distributing them. They do this themselves, after the fashion of ten dogs after one bone, but with surprising good nature. They love tobacco, which they get from the ubiquitous Chinese or Malay traders. Having no paper with which to make cigarettes, they generally eat the tobacco, but some roll the coarse shag in pandanus leaves, making cigars which would put to sleep even confirmed smokers like us.

The hours pass swiftly and we hear a pattering

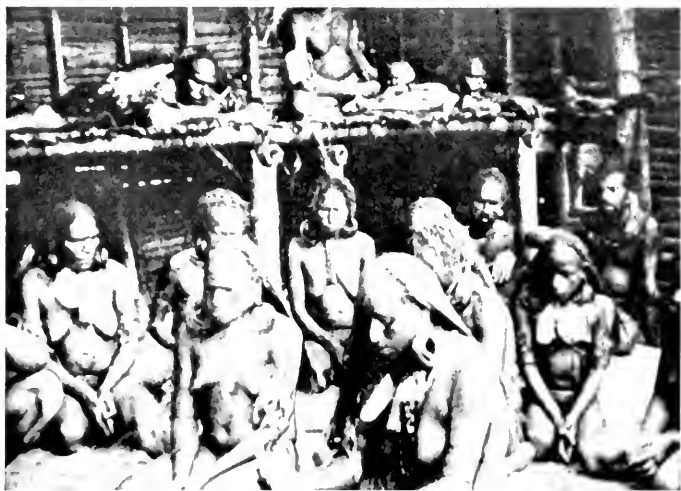
44 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

on the dry palm-leaves above us. The sky is overcast and we have four miles of humid going ahead of us. After an afternoon spent in lolling around with our new friends we hear the call of the bath-house, and we bid them adieu,—for the present without reluctance.

If these are the good Kia Kias,—in contact with whites more or less, for they live beneath the shadow of the assistant's authority,—we wonder what the tribes in the interior are like. "Well," we tell ourselves, "we shall see them soon now. Next week at this time we shall be among them, alone and far from the arm of the white man's law."



A long platform which entirely encircles the kampong



During the day the men occupy the sleeping benches, while the women sit upon the sandy floor of the shacks

CHAPTER IV

THE ASSISTANT AND THE NAUTILUS

THE whitewashed buildings of the government headquarters reflect the sunlight with an intolerable glare as we swing up the path from the road. At the door of the assistant's office we are greeted by an obsequious Ambonese in regulation white. His trousers are very short, though whether by design or because of repeated shrinkings, I am not prepared to say. On his head he wears a batik turban one corner of which seems to flirt with us in feminine coquettishness as he bows and scrapes. The "Residentee" is awaiting our pleasure, he informs us. From the cool semi-darkness of the office comes a voice in soft Malay telling the man to show the Tuans in, and forthwith we enter. After the terrific glare of out-of-doors we grope

46 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

momentarily, but our eyes soon accommodate themselves to the grateful dimness and we see before us a little brown-skinned man of some forty years, with bristling mustachios, extending a friendly hand.

He is filled with the importance of the occasion. Are we well? Do we like Merauke? Are we sufficiently comfortable in the *passangrahan*? Have we recovered from the ennui of our long voyage? He showers us with solicitation as to our welfare and immediately we feel that we are among friends. It is a habit that these foreign officials have, to make one at home upon the instant.

Greetings over and assurance given that all is as it should be, we, running true to American form, get down to business. This is distinctly painful to the "Residentee," for as yet we are not really acquainted. He lifts his hands in remonstrance and exclaims, "Ah, these Americans!" and shakes his head as though nonplussed at our bustling impetuosity. "Hurry, hurry, hurry!" he remarks audibly, but really to

himself; then to us: "You must slow down over here or you will not last; the heat, it is too much." He tells us this with a sage-like shake of his head.

His desire to please, however, outweighs his scruples against talking business in the first ten minutes of an acquaintance and he asks us what he can do for us, in the manner of one who will give anything yet secretly fears that he may be asked the impossible. These Americans, you know, think that just anything can be done. A wave of the hand and presto, it is!

What we want is really a good deal, so, taking a fresh grip on our nerve and with a deep breath to go on, we request in a low, dulcet voice: "The loan of the government schooner and crew for a few weeks. We are very much interested in the Kia Kias and should like to study them in their homes, far away from outside influences. Will you be so kind as to let us have the schooner for a trip around the western end of the island, where the really wild tribes live?"

The Assistant heaves a sigh of relief. "What

48 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

could be easier!" he exclaims. His slim brown hand taps a bell on the desk before him and a "boy" of fifty slides into adamantine immobility beside the doorway of the sanctum. In a few terse words the captain of the *Nautilus* is summoned. It seems that our little Assistant is something of a martinet with his men. When within range of his eye they straighten up with ramrod stiffness. In his domain his word is law; rather, he *is* the law.

Ula, skipper of the *Nautilus*, has been lounging in the shade of the Chinese *toko*, or general store, near the dock. The *toko* is but a few rods from the Assistant's office, and the man sent for the skipper readily finds him. The two enter together and stand at attention while the Assistant delivers himself of a long harangue in Malay that flows in so rapid a stream that our unaccustomed ears catch only a small part of it.

Ula does not seem inordinately happy over the prospect. From the mention of prampoen and the assistant's angry tone as Ula utters the word, we gather that he has a new sweetheart who is

occupying his time at present. The conversation dies away in a moment, and the Assistant later tells us that Ula wanted to know whether he might take the girl with him to finish his courting.

Ula departs disconsolately for the schooner. The Assistant has ordered it made ready for us to-morrow morning. He waves a deprecating hand at our effusive thanks and says that he is only sorry that he cannot do more for us. He asks us about America, meaning the United States, and we chat for an hour. As the time for his siesta draws near we rise to go, for in the islands one must never interfere with another's midday sleep; it is n't done.

Before we take leave of the obliging little man he asks us to be permitted as an especial favor to ship a party of five Kia Kias up the coast a little distance on "our" schooner. They are some natives that have just finished a one-month term in the local *hoosgorw* or jail. The offense was trivial. There had been a disagreement in their village with a visitor and when

the argument ended the visitor was deceased.

"We have to check them a little," remarks the Assistant. "We could not fix the blame exactly, so we gathered up three men who were implicated and two of them brought their wives."

After further assurances on the part of the Assistant that the natives shall in no way interfere with our convenience on the schooner, and from us many expressions of our gratitude, we depart. As we walk down the sweltering roadway along the riverfront we congratulate ourselves on the success of the interview. The *Nautilus* will save us many heartbreaking miles of grueling jungle travel.

In the passangrahan Moh has a "rice-taffle" ready for us. Rice-taffle! No wonder these Dutch gentlemen indulge in an all-afternoon siesta! Every noon—rice-taffle! A tremendous bowl of rice, chicken cooked in four or five different ways,—boiled, fried, roasted, and I don't know how to describe the others,—two or three varieties of fish; a peppery soup-like sauce with which to drench the heaped-up contents of the

platter, and a dozen different sweetmeats, condiments, and garnitures. It is so good that one invariably overeats and repletion, together with the sultry heat of midday, brings a drowsiness that makes bed welcome. Even the ever-busineslike Chinese closes his toko and sleeps until four o'clock. At that hour, or shortly after, every one wakes up and the splashing in the bathhouse is prodigious. The evening coolness brings the hour of the promenade and the streets and byways are gay with the varicolored sarongs that the Malay women affect. The men come forth in suits of white drill fresh from the dhobie and saunter along with cigarettes aglow, leading by the hands naked kiddies for whom they have a very genuine fondness.

Many of the little girls of, say, three to six years wear, suspended from a single cord around their plump little loins, a pendant that serves both as covering and ornament. This usually takes the form of a gold or silver heart of possibly three-inch length and proportionate width. It is amusing to watch a group of these

52 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

innocents at play. Sometimes a small girl's heart becomes displaced, and hangs unnoticed for a time upon her hip. This is not at all disconcerting to her or to her infant male companions. When she discovers the disarrangement of this sole article of her apparel she will stop play and readjust it with the utmost unconcern and charming naïveté. Play is then resumed. Her manner is precisely that of one of our high-school girls who pauses between sets in tennis to powder her nose.

As we pass the people in the promenade, all from elders down to the little naked tots, greet us with "*Tabe, Tuan,*" and the elders smile in fond amusement at their offsprings' baby lisping of the greeting. We like the Malays very much; and the Chinese, too, for they are always pleasant to us.

CHAPTER V

WE 'RE OFF!

HIGH tide at nine to-day! On the *Nautilus* the crew are shortening up on the anchor chain, for the rusty old hook has been buried in the river mud for two months. We sail at full tide, which enables us to skirt the shore of the western flats and save much time in getting out to sea.

Moh has superintended the moving of all our effects to the little schooner while we have been in the trading-company's store making some eleventh-hour purchases of tobacco and tin mirrors for the natives and cigars for ourselves. The three white men in charge bid us Godspeed, after many admonitions to take care of ourselves and warnings not to trust the Kia Kias too far. Grouped in a little knot upon the veranda of the

54 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

store, silent, they sadly watch us depart. We, too, hate to say good-by; we have had some pleasant chats with them.

We go directly to the schooner, anxious to take up the trail to adventure. Ula is waiting for us beside the wharf in the tiny dinghy. As we drop into it it sinks with our weight so that the gunwale is scarcely three inches above water and we have visions of making the short trip to the *Nautilus* each for himself, swimming. Nothing more serious than the shipping of a few gallons of the muddy river water happens, however, and we arrive alongside the *Nautilus*, in high spirits, though with feet and legs soaked. We probably shall be much wetter than this before the trip is over, is the cheering thought that comes to us.

As we clamber up over the schooner's low rail we scan the deck. Up forward are our five ex-convicts. Their brief sojourn in the hoosgow has quieted them down a bit and they are not particularly effusive in their greetings. In fact, they don't even notice us, but sit huddled together just back of the anchor winch with dirty

bark-cloth blankets thrown over their heads. We go forward to look them over and they return our gaze with a half-conciliatory, half-annoyed expression that makes us grin.

Our grin seems to be taken as an assurance of good-will, for they in turn smile slightly and one of the women bursts out in a hearty laugh. From that moment we "belong." Ula seems anxious to get under way and comes stumbling forward with two of the crew. Most of our barang is still on deck, awaiting our orders concerning its disposal, and over this the trio have some difficulty in making their way. The dinghy further complicates matters, for it has been hoisted and deposited edge up beside the rail. One of the crew jumps upon it, as the easiest way, and runs over it, balancing like a tight-rope walker on the narrow rolling edge of the thing as though it were a solid sidewalk. His pride takes a fall, however, for as he jumps from it he finds insecure footing where the water from the dinghy has made the deck slippery and falls flat, to the huge delight of our friends the criminals.

56 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

The boys hoist the sail on the foremast and the *Nautilus* swings around to break out the anchor. This done, Ula snaps a sharp command in Malay to the boys in the bow, who seize the rusty handles of the winch and slowly bring the old mud-hook to the surface. How they accomplish this is a mystery, for at every turn one of the handles of the winch slips on the shaft, while Ula tries to tighten it with wedges of wood driven into the handle socket.

Our Kia Kia friends are very much interested in the proceedings and gather closely around. This gets on Ula's nerves to such an extent that he unceremoniously kicks the men out of the way, which they do not seem to resent particularly; they sit down again out of harm's way, but keep up a lively flow of comment. Ula is much disgusted with them and the glances he gives them make us wonder if they are going to enjoy their trip home.

The town is fast dropping into the hazy distance, and save for the chatter of the crew and the natives, and now and then the thumping

splash of a husky comber against the bow, all is silent. Moh places our dunnage below in the tiny saloon. He carries the groceries down last, for he will have to cook all of our meals there. The crew cook theirs over a sort of fireplace built right on deck, just aft of the foremast. After inspecting the saloon, which contains two sleeping-bunks, we decide to sleep on deck. The atmosphere of the saloon is hard to describe. It is hot and stuffy and a strong smell of bilge-water comes from beneath the floor. No, it is n't possible to sleep there. Moh grins when we tell him to place our cots on deck.

We clear the mouth of the river and swing outward on a long tack, for the wind is coming dead against us. This will make the up-coast trip slow, but what care we? We have plenty of time and then we may always console ourselves with the thought, "Well, maybe something will happen." As we swerve into the trough of the sea the *Nautilus* begins to roll and a groan comes from the Kia Kias on the forward deck. They are experiencing their first case of seasickness

58 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

and seem very wretched indeed. I have been told that seasickness is wholly mental and that babies are never sick at sea because they have no fear of being so, nor any knowledge of how others are affected. The poor savages by the foremast seem to refute this theory, for though they are grown-ups, they can have had no previous experience of the sea, having come from far inland, and it is not likely that they have ever discussed seasickness. They succumb one by one until all are down.

Moh walks by with a stony glare in his eye, as though all were not right with him, and later becomes a delicate robin's-egg green around the gills, but he continues at work with a never-say-die expression that wins our admiration. Moh is all right, we whisper to ourselves; he's game, anyway.

The day wears on, the only diversion being when Ula calls to the men to tack. He is sitting beside us in the stern with the tiller ropes in hand. Now and then we attempt to break the monotony by taking a turn at steering, and

silently flatter ourselves that we are doing it as skilfully as he. But Ula now and then casts a critical glance aloft and finally takes the ropes from us. A slight tug at one or the other of them and the sails fill, catching all the wind which we have been missing. There is an amused grin on Ula's face. Moh is asleep on the deck in the shade of the low saloon bulkhead. The sea is very calm and the sky cloudless except for a few low-hanging clouds which fringe the horizon in the west. The easy swells lull us into slumber, from which we are roused—after what seems only ten minutes but is really two hours—by Moh, who is calling us to *makanan*. This is the Malay word for dinner and is, I believe, the first word of the language learned by the traveler.

He has unpacked our camp table and set it on the deck. Our meal consists of canned goods brought from the good old U. S. A. We purchased a two-months' supply of them in Java and Moh is delighted, for all he has to do to cook them is to put a great bucket of water on the fire, dump the cans into it, and, when it has

60 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

boiled a sufficient length of time, fish them out and open them. He is thrifty, too, for he saves the hot water in the bucket to wash the dishes with.

We have made only one mistake in picking out our dishes: we purchased aluminum cups. Every time we essay a mouthful of hot coffee—and Moh serves it piping hot—there is a sputter and the air becomes lurid with imprecations. It is astonishing how hot those metal cups can get. Every time we burn our lips on them Moh looks up with a terrified, wondering expression, as though in doubt as to whether we are berating him as a cook or what. The Malay does not understand the soul-satisfaction the white man gets from swearing. He must have some specific object upon which to vent his feelings and his invectives invariably take the form of some terrible expression such as "*Babi kow*," meaning "You pig," or some similarly outrageous figure of speech. Compared with our most conservative epithets the vocabulary of the Malay is singularly amateurish.

While Moh clears away the debris of the evening meal we stoke up the old briers and watch the sunset. In the Indies this is usually one of the events of the day. Shortly after nightfall, which comes in these latitudes with surprising rapidity, we peel off our clothes and stretch out on our cots with no other covering than our pajamas. The sky is a diamond-studded canopy above us,—blue velvet, unfathomable in depth. We shall be sound asleep when the moon rises and shall probably miss that, though it is almost worth waiting for. Above us, but a little to the south of the zenith, hangs the Southern Cross, which resembles somewhat a broken kite,—one of those two-sticked kites of boyhood that was diamond-shaped and had one bowed stick. We fall asleep trying to count the stars in one of the constellations. As I drop off I wonder drowsily if it will rain before morning. If it does! Oh, well, what matter? We can change to dry pajamas.

Ula is still on duty at the tiller when we drift into slumber. He has a bottle of cognac beside

62 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

him for company, and for solace, too, we imagine. He must have hated to leave his lady-love with the courting just begun. He knows full well that there are many other Ulas in her vicinity who will do their best to keep her from pining while he is away. In all probability, though, should he find that in his absence another has taken his place, he will be just as content with her next older sister. It really does n't matter much.

Six bells. The air is stifling. There is a loud drumming sound over and around us. As we come wide awake we realize what the matter is. The *Nautilus* was headed for a heavy squall and Ula called Moh, who, rather than waken us, simply spread a heavy tarpaulin over us to protect us from the rain. It was the smothering and not the storm that roused us. How he got the covering spread without disturbing us we shall never know. We rise up on our elbows and peer out from under it. The rain is coming down in torrents. Ula is still at the tiller. His

clothes stick to him and the water is running in a steady stream from the turned-down brim of his brown straw hat. He has tied it upon his head with a string passed underneath his jaw. His water-soaked figure is ludicrous and we burst into laughter. Ula apparently enjoys the situation, himself, and does not seem to mind the wetting. The bottle of cognac is still beside him, so he won't get cold. His capacity for liquor is a matter of great pride to him; it is the envy of his fellows and the subject of much discussion among them.

Like all tropical storms, the squall passes soon and we are able to toss off the heavy "tarp." Under it the heat is terrific. We wonder how the Kia Kias up forward are faring, but are not sufficiently interested to go there and find out. If Ula and the crew can stand it, they should be able to. A thorough soaking will do them good, for it is only with rain that their bodies are ever moistened. They have a constitutional dislike for water, even as a beverage. For drink they are quite content with the milk of the cocoanut,

the meat of which forms a large part of their diet.

After the squall the air is cool and deliciously sweet. The breeze comes again and fills the dripping sails which have been hanging limp and motionless. Some of the crew are clustered around the fireplace, cooking fish. They spit them upon slivers broken from one of our packing-cases and toast them over the open fire. Moh is squatted among them and seems to be quite at home. Occasional words drift to us, indicating that the topic of discussion is the usual one,—the virtues of their respective women. This is a subject that the Malay never seems to tire of. In the kampongs the women talk likewise of the men. Having nothing else to occupy their thoughts, no business or serious occupation, naturally they are interested chiefly in one another and they discuss with the utmost candor subjects of which the European never speaks.

We listen, and are properly shocked at some of the things said which bring forth bursts of delighted laughter from the listeners; never-

theless we cock our ears so as not to miss any of them. One of the boys is telling how well his sweetheart dances and he gives a demonstration which to us is lewd in the extreme and occasions uproarious laughter. His companions slap him on the back and urge him to continue, but he shakes his head in refusal when Ula calls to him to come and show the *Tuans*, meaning us. This breaks up the party, for they believed us to be asleep. They are very reserved in the presence of the stranger, for they sense that their ways are not ours.

It is only upon ripe acquaintance that the male native will speak of his family affairs to the white man, though the women seem to be always ready to gossip.

When the whispering begins again Ula looks at us and grins. He wags his head as though to say, "It's too bad, for he is very funny, but I can't make him do it." We are just as well satisfied, and we turn over to our sleep. Ula has just tossed the empty cognac bottle over the side, where it bobs away into the darkness in a

wabbly dance. The idle thought drifts through my mind that I should like to cork up some wild message in that bottle on the chance of its being picked up. But white men who could read it seldom visit this lonely coast.

We are the first to come in years, except the few "paradise-hunters." Some of these have taken the paradise away with them, while others, seeking the one kind of paradise, have found another and have remained after having served as the *pièce de résistance* of some gastronomic function.

CHAPTER VI

SHIPWRECKED AMONG CANNIBALS

THE days have flown almost uncounted. Our native passengers left us several days ago, after we had passed a large river which it was impossible for them to cross on account of its width and depth. They had refused to go home on foot, for this would have necessitated their traversing unfriendly territory they knew to be dangerous in the extreme.

Landing on the other side of the river, they were among tribes more or less friendly to their own and stood an excellent chance of reaching home in safety.

Their absence was welcome, for they had reduced the tiny forward deck to the condition of a pigsty. Once during their stay on board two of them tried to get friendly with us and came aft

68 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

like children encroaching on forbidden ground, but Ula made their stay one of exceedingly short duration. In fact, they did n't stay at all. They did n't even pause, for as they stepped around the saloon-deck combing Ula spied them and with a well-directed heave of a large wooden thole-pin snatched from its socket on the rail sent them scurrying back to their end of the ship.

Five minutes after we had landed them they disappeared in the mystic silence of the jungle, anxious to gain the safety of their familiar haunts.

We remained on shore for an hour to stretch our legs, for the close quarters on the *Nautilus* make some sort of exercise necessary. We wandered up-river for a little distance and saw, floating in the shallows near the shore, seven or eight basking crocodiles which slowly sank from view as we approached. Many funny little fish, with heads like frogs and fins in front like short fore legs, flopped and jumped about on the muddy flats the receding tide had left. We watched them for some minutes and laughed

hugely at the antics of the fiddler-crabs fighting and trying to drag one another into their respective holes, where the victor could eat his unfortunate neighbor in peace, secure from interruption.

Upon our return to the schooner we found Ula holding aloft an almost empty cognac bottle. Upon his face there was a look of sorrow, for this, it seemed, was the very last of his once plentiful stock. After carefully measuring the contents with a speculative eye, he came to the conclusion that the remaining fluid was sufficient for only one more drink and raised the bottle to his lips. The cognac disappeared in one long swallow, and Ula dropped the empty bottle over the rail as though he were parting from his last friend. This was as it should be, for of late he had begun to show the effects of quarts previously imbibed. He seemed able to stand one or two, but many bottles drunk in rather quick succession were making themselves felt.

Though he was fairly steady on his feet, his eyes told the tale and his tongue had become

noticeably thick. That evening he came to us and requested that we let him start on the stock we carry in our medicine kit. Of course we refused, and he sulkily returned to the stern sheets in disconsolate dejection. Later Ula was seized with a brilliant idea. His system craved alcohol. He must have it, he told himself. The compass of the *Nautilus* held nearly a pint of grain alcohol. His face lighted with anticipation and before we realized the meaning of his fumbling with the instrument he had unscrewed the top and had drained the raw spirits to the last drop. It was a draft to kill a mule and probably would have ended him, but his tortured stomach refused to retain it. Enough of it stayed down, however, to reduce Ula to the most satisfying state of inebriation he had ever experienced. He became very friendly and most anxious to please, while we just looked at each other. There was nothing to be done. We thanked Providence that there was no more of the stuff within his reach and turned away from him in disgust.

That was just an hour or so ago, and we have

been sitting reading while the *Nautilus* slipped through the water smoothly, as though she were commanded by a skipper who was the soul of sobriety. There is land to starboard, a mile or two away, one would judge, and over there a little distance ahead we see smoke coming from the jungle. It is the first sign of native life we have seen since leaving Merauke. After a hurried discussion we ask Ula what the place is, but he is foolishly drunk and we cannot make out what he says, so we decide for ourselves and tell him to head for the shore as we wish to visit the place. Ula swings over the tiller obligingly, and we move at a lively clip across the wind toward the place.

We shall go ashore and investigate the kampong and, if it interests us, move our camping-outfit there and settle down for a few days. Moh brings up our cameras and guns while the crew unfasten the dinghy from its place beside the rail. We go below, to load some fresh rolls into the kodaks, where the light is not so strong. Five minutes pass while we are engaged in this

72 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

undertaking and speculation as to what kind of kampong we shall find, when suddenly there is a terrific shock, a rending, crunching sound, and we pick ourselves up from the saloon floor and gaze blankly at each other, for the fraction of a moment speechless with consternation. The cause of the crash is self-evident. We are on a reef.

From beneath the floor comes the gurgle of a torrent of water which is pouring into the *Nautilus* through a gaping hole in her bottom. We are high upon a submerged reef of rocky coral, shipwrecked among cannibals! What the tribe is that lives on shore and how friendly it is remain to be seen. The moment is one of those deadly potential eternities that either make one lose all self-control or become cold sober. Luckily, we are not of the hysterical type and our first thought is to get our guns, food, and cameras to a place of safety on shore. The schooner may slide off the reef into deep water at any moment, and then we shall be in a pickle.

Working like mad, we begin heaving our pos-

sessions up on deck, and I go up to see that it is properly stowed in the dinghy. The crew are working like demons, and Ula, sobered by the catastrophe, has ordered the men to get the anchor hooked into the reef and the chain drawn taut to hold us there.

I take command and order some of the men to get the dinghy overside, and into it we pack all that it will hold. It is sent ashore, and five trips are necessary to transport the whole of our outfit. We go ashore with the third load to see that it is properly cared for. There is a high surf running, and in order to get the dinghy through it without soaking the baggage we have to jump overboard into waist-deep water and help steer it through the breakers. The barang is piled up just above the reach of the incoming surges, but the tide seems to be rising.

It is necessary to get the stuff higher up, out of reach of the water, and we bend our energies in that direction. The beach seems to be deserted, and we wonder whether or not the natives have discovered our presence. We are soon to

74 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

be informed as to this, for suddenly we hear a guttural grunt and an explosive, "*Uhumen!* [Go away!]" coming from the fringe of tall *tapa* grass that fringes the beach. We gaze in startled surprise in the direction of the sound and even as we look there spring, like mushrooms, from the thick grass a long row of black heads which seem to number hundreds.

We stop work for the moment and stand in indecision, facing the watching line of feather-crowned heads. Three of the natives rise from their crouching position and advance toward us, waving their arms and shouting, "*Uhumen!*" From their menacing manner it is evident that we are *de trop*, that they wish us to depart. This is out of the question, for our only means of conveyance is at least temporarily on the rocks. A rapid calculation tells us that we are about three hundred miles from the town of Merauke. To walk to it is out of the question, also, for we could not carry sufficient provender, together with our expensive equipment, to sustain us during the journey. We are between the hammer

and the anvil. The only solution of the difficulty is to make friends with the natives.

The best way to do this is to assert ourselves immediately, to show ourselves masters of the situation. If we allow the natives to take the initiative, things will go hard with us. They have all seen white men before, or, if not, have heard much about them and fear them.

We must seem to justify that fear. As the three Kia Kias draw near to us we beckon to them and, pointing to the barang, tell them sternly in Malay, to carry it up out of reach of the tide. The middle one draws himself up proudly at this and again points to the wreck of the *Nautilus*, saying, "*Uhumen!*" Again we indicate the barang and order it carried up the beach. The others in the grass have risen now and are watching intently but in silence the action of their chiefs.

The first rule in dealing with the native is never to allow him to disobey the orders of a white man, and we have given an order. It must be carried out. Once more we command

76 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

them to move the barang, stepping close to the middle chief, who seems to be in authority. He refuses for them all. The time for action has come. He receives a forceful blow on the point of his jaw; without a sound he goes down. His six-foot body stretches out full-length on the sand, lies quiet for the moment; then, his senses slowly returning, he rises painfully and, cowering before us, goes to the pile of barang, selects the lightest of the pieces, carries it to a spot we designate, and deposits it there. Then he turns to the others and calls to them to come and assist him with the work.

We do not understand the meaning of his words and as a precautionary measure draw our Colt "forty-fives," ready for an emergency. The automatics can speak a rapid language. Spears and war-clubs are not much of a match for them. We know the natives will not stand against firearms. At the first bark of the heavy pistols they would disappear into the jungle, never to return.

Moh seems to have vanished and we turn to

look for him. There he is, standing so close behind us that he is like our shadow. His face is positively green. Poor devil! he is scared speechless! With the safe stowage of our equipment we stop to consider for a moment. The spot we are now on is well above the reach of the tide and will make an admirable camp site. It is far enough from the thick-growing coconuts to render us safe from surprise attack. We decide to pitch the tents here.

Since our first show of authority the natives have withdrawn to a discreet distance and are seated cross-legged in the sand, intently watching our preparations for camp-making. They are chattering volubly among themselves, though whether in anger or not, we cannot tell. Among our boxes we come to a carton of coarse shag tobacco which has been broken open and the idea comes that it might not be amiss to make them a little present as a sort of friendship offering.

We gather up an armful of the little blue packages and walk toward the savages slowly. They all rise to their feet as we approach; they

78 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

are not quite sure of our intentions, and are ready to fly at the first sign of trouble. That uncere-
monious chastening of their chief in the face of
terrific odds has instilled in them a wholesome
awe of us.

Conversation is difficult, for we do not speak
their language. After a time, however, we seem
to make our intentions understood, and a smile
appears on the faces of some of them, here and
there, as the light of comprehension bursts upon
them. These in turn tell their fellows, and soon
broad smiles wreath the faces of all, even includ-
ing the sober face of the chastened one. Their
manner becomes almost affable and we walk
slowly around the semicircle, passing to each a
package of the shag. None of them thank us,
except with their eyes, but all of them immedi-
ately devote their attention to the packets, tear-
ing them open and stuffing whole mouthfuls of
tobacco into cavernous cheeks that distend in
funny pouch-like roundness, reminding us of the
monkeys we saw six months ago on the sacred
island in the Queen River in Borneo.

With the gift of the tobacco we seem to have acquired membership in their clan and they cluster around us in apparent friendliness, much to our discomfort. One and all are besmeared with rancid cocoanut-oil mixed with various earth pigments, and the odor is terrific. This will never do, we tell ourselves, and we motion them to withdraw a little. They are obedient and return to the place where they were sitting before. They are about twenty yards from the spot where the boys are erecting the tents. This is a sufficient distance for comfort, so we take up pieces of driftwood and, beginning at the grass-line of the beach, draw a circle in the sand around the tents. This, we inform them by means of signs, is the dead-line and none may pass it without permission. They all nod in comprehension.

Moh regards us with reverential awe. They cannot be kept too far away to suit him. He knows better than we that the Kia Kias are not to be trusted too far. They may be friendly one moment and the very next turn upon one un-

80 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

aware. He tells us so, and with the warning comes the adjurations of our friends in Merauke. A little precaution will not be amiss, we decide, and our rifles are placed within reach, ready for instant use. Our automatics are our constant companions. Somehow, though, it all seems unnecessary. We have done, and intend them, no wrong.

The incoming tide is playing havoc with the *Nautilus*. Great combers are breaking over her rail on the weather side and she is careening drunkenly, her masts canted over at a sharp angle. Ula and the men depart for her, to salvage what they can before she slides off the reef into deep water.

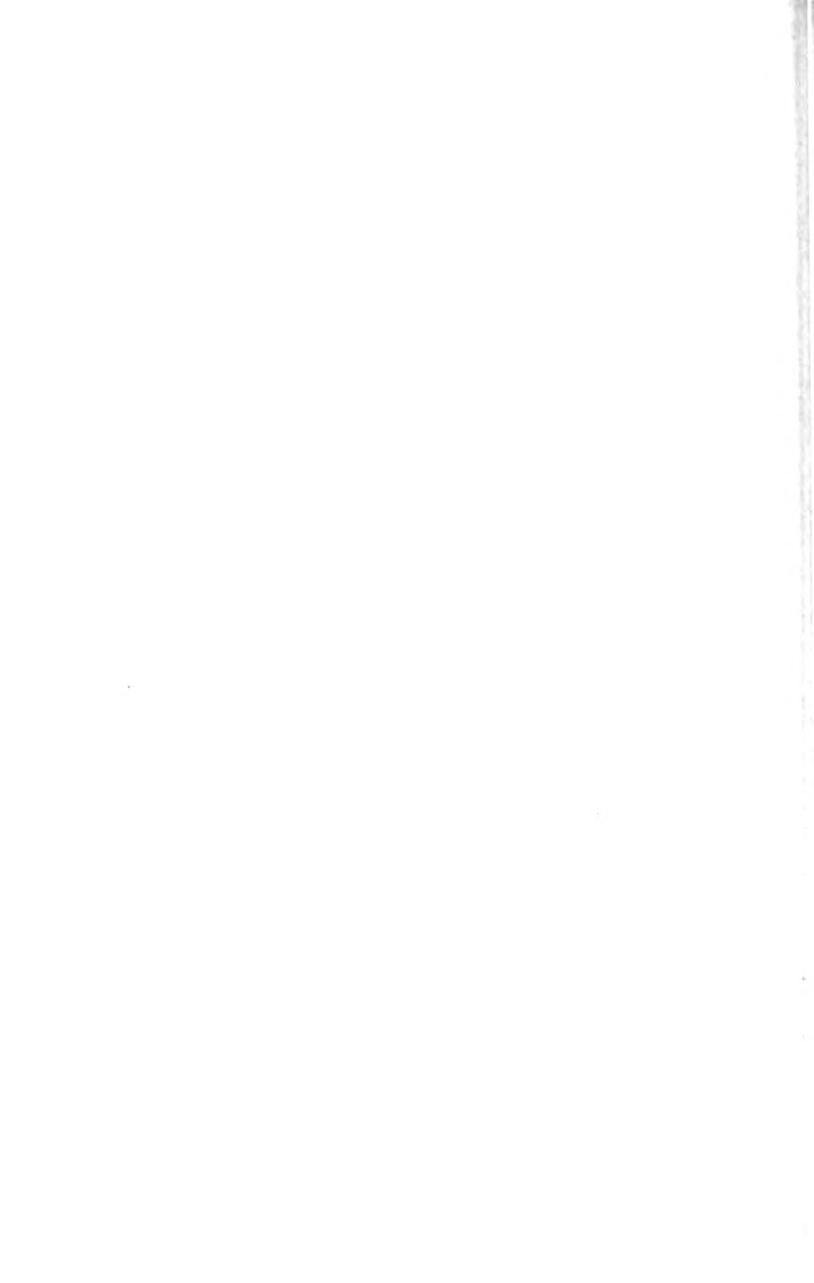
When they return they bring two bags of water-soaked rice which they have rescued from the schooner's hold. They report that she is a total loss and can never be saved. The coral has torn a gaping hole in her bottom and the planking, including the keelson, is crushed beyond repair. The outlook is not pleasant. When we ask Ula how soon some Malay trading-schooner



Seated at a discreet distance, watching our camp-making intently



There had been a disagreement in the village



is likely to happen along, he cheerfully informs us that this is the storm season and that one may not make this part of the coast for months.

We look at each other blankly for a moment and then laugh. We were looking for adventure, were n't we? Well, we have it. We shall have ample time to study the cannibals at home. Our opportunity could not be better, but we wonder—Oh, well, when in doubt—dine!

Moh is nonplussed at our decision. To dine we must have water. Where to get it worries him. He has visions of himself going to some lonely water-hole back in the jungle, with stealthy Kia Kias creeping up on him, mouths watering in anticipation, to jerk him hence. His face is positively pitiful as he looks at us and says:

“Tuan, ini tida ayer minum. [Master, there is no drinking-water.]”

We allay his fears, for we tell him that we will go with him to find it, and, taking one of the natives for a guide, we set out to find it. It is always plentiful in the jungle, for there are numberless little brooks threading the deep

82 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

silences of the thickets not far from the shore-line. A hundred yards from the camp we come upon a small stream from which we fill the buckets, and Moh soon has dinner under way. As night falls we mount guard in turns of four hours on and four off. We are under constant attack while on duty, for the mosquitos swarm upon us in clouds. With the help of veils, gloves, and choking smudge we worry through our respective watches.

Moh does not sleep at all the first night, but sits in the drifting smoke of the burning cocoa husks in downcast self-commiseration. We cannot quite make out why he left happy Java to come on a fool trip like this. He thinks all Americans are crazy, for they do not seem to know fear. He keeps the coffee-pot working for us and fills the lamp once when the gasoline runs low. The mantle-lamp, hanging between the tents and the forest, throws a white glare over the camp site. We are burning it for two reasons: it lights up the jungle approach to the camp and draws the myriad insects to its

killing heat in swarms. Thus we shall be warned of the approach of danger and at the same time, to some extent, rid of the pests. When on guard we keep in the shadow of a board from a packing-case placed between us and the lamp, so that the light may not blind us with its glare.

The murmur of the surf seems to whisper to us of lurking dangers and the night is eery with unaccustomed sounds that come from the jungle. As the breeze stirs the fronds of the cocoas they rasp together. Now and then a falling nut thumps to the ground with startling abruptness. Each sound is magnified by our nervous expectancy, until the night becomes hideous with sounds and the grotesque shadows the ferns cast in the lamplight move weirdly to and fro like creeping savages. More than once we sit bolt upright with rifles tightly clutched as some shadow takes on a human shape or moves slowly toward us. The rising moon casts a wan half-light over the scene, for it is in its last quarter. The scene is one of indescribable beauty and never-to-be-forgotten tensivity. Even the crew of

the *Nautilus* are crouched around a tiny smudge of their own, wide awake and silent. The air is surcharged with an electric expectancy; the darkness a malign mantle of doubt. How the hours drag, and how we wish for dawn?



Those who failed to get a package came to the deadline and asked
for one



They may be friendly at one moment and turn upon one the very
next

CHAPTER VII

WE ESTABLISH DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS

SHALL we ever forget that sunrise and how the glow in the east chased the pregnant shadows? Never! We are not afraid, that is, afraid in the usual sense of the term. If the natives had attacked us we should have joyously risen to the occasion and put Mr. Colt to the fore to argue for us. It was the suspense we minded. Those things which we can see and gage with our full consciousness never bother us. It is the unseen and mysterious that we dread. When one does not know what to expect, nor from which direction the danger may come, it is the nerve tension, the high-keyed alertness, that saps the system of its reserve stamina and makes the goose-flesh crawl along the spine at the slightest unidentified sound. It is the intangible, the unseen, the insidious stealthy

86 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

danger that creeps upon one unawares, that strikes in the dark where one is unable to strike in return, that make the night vigil nerve-racking. Genial old Imagination creates dangers that do not exist. Dawn is welcome to the watcher, always, but doubly so when one is literally between covetous devils and the deep sea.

To control, one must gather things into the grip of one's own hands. One must take the initiative; therefore, we shall go early this morning to the kampong. We are just making ready the things we shall need while away from camp when there drifts to us on the fresh breeze a wild cadence which quickens the pulse. Whether it is war-cry or song of welcome we do not know, but it sounds ominous to our unaccustomed ears, at any rate. Our heads pop out from the tents *concerto*, much like those of the impossible policemen of the movies, and our eyes pop also at what we see. In the distance comes the gang. They are making their way toward our camp with considerable esprit de corps, weapons wildly waving and throats roar-

ing. This will bear looking into, we feel, and the Colts are loosened tentatively in their holsters. As the savages draw near we heave a sigh or two of relief, for we realize that this at least is not The Moment.

Those who are not yelling at the top of their leather lungs are laughing and they come to a walk as they approach our sacred demesne. Obedient to our instructions of yesterday, they halt at the furrow in the sand that marks the limits of our arm's-length hospitality and stand there like a throng of spoiling-for-something children. We advance to meet them and they chatter volubly at us and hold out their hands as though demanding something. One of them, who evidently has heard the Malay traders name the weed in his own tongue, asks—or, rather, shouts,—“*Rocco!*” which is Malay for “tobacco.” It is the old familiar “rush act” that they are giving us and we are too much relieved at their unwarlike attitude to refuse them.

The open carton is dragged out with despatch and each of the natives is presented with one

blue package. The black men cavort around like a lot of exuberant school-boys while awaiting their turn to receive the little present. Finally they begin to cluster too close and as the task of distributing the tobacco becomes difficult and contact with greasy, smelly arms and clutching hands inevitable, we toss the remaining packets over the heads of the nearer ones and there ensues a wild scramble.

Many of them lose out in the *mêlée* and must do without, while many have received two portions. Those who fail to get any come to the dead-line and with hands outstretched ask for some, but this we refuse. They must be taught decorum. They hang around for a time and finally drift away in the direction of the *kampong*, where their more successful brothers have gone. Some of them seem to be much put out, and we turn over in our minds the advisability of calling them back and giving each a package of tobacco. A moment's consideration, however, convinces us that this would be an admission of weakness and would be taken advantage

of later. When the white man has concluded a matter he must let the native know that it is settled for all time.

When the last of the cannibals has departed and we reënter our tent to conclude our preparations for the visit to the kampong we encounter Moh. With the coming of the howling crew of savages he dived into the tent to hide, and he now crawls from beneath a cot as nearly white as his olive skin will permit.

Moh believed this to be his last hour on earth and he tried to prolong the agony by hiding. He is speechless with fright, for he could hear the racket outside the tent, but could not see what was transpiring. Never, never again will he leave his fair home in Java to go adventuring with Americans! His cup is brimming over and his voice, when it returns, quavers in a falsetto ecstasy of trepidation. As a fighting-man, Moh is a good cook. That suffices.

Our march to the kampong is one of many thrills. The natives whom we believed to have returned to the village have simply withdrawn

90 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

to the screening jungle and from its cover watch us with none too friendly interest. They do not like the idea of our visit, for their women are in the village and they are not sure that we may not take a liking to some of them and carry them off. This has been done in times past by other white men in other kampongs and for all we know may have been done right here. Our purpose in coming to their country is, of course, inexplicable to the savages and necessarily we are objects of great distrust.

Now and then we see shadows flitting noiselessly from tree trunk to thick-growing shrubbery as they follow our course and twice we encounter stalwart warriors standing like sentinels near the pathway as though disdainful of concealment. These, as we smilingly address them, merely grunt a non-committal reply and glower at us through narrowed lids. As we pass them they withdraw into the undergrowth, to travel silently abreast of us but well out of sight.

When we finally step out of the dimness of

the jungle into the clearing of the kampong we find an apparently deserted village. News of our coming has preceded us, and all the inhabitants are hiding indoors. One glance down the little street shows us that the kampong is different from the one we visited at Merauke. This one consists of five low shacks each of which is tenanted by several families, and it has no enclosing wall. Each house is similar to its neighbor and measures roughly, one would say, fifty feet in length by twenty in width. The side walls must be seven or eight feet in height and the roof rises to a ridge about fifteen feet above the ground. Centrally located in the street end of the house is the only door of which it boasts, and perched above and around this dark opening are grisly reminders of deceased foemen who have passed beyond via the roasting-pit. Over each of the doorways hang the skulls of several human beings, interspersed with those of crocodiles that the braves of the household have killed in their hunting-excursions.

Before the first of the shacks a short, forked

92 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

sapling is planted and from each of the lopped-off branches of the fork there grins at us in loose-jawed mockery a sun-bleached reminder that the Kia Kias are a people of perverted taste. As we near the entrance of this dwelling we are greeted by a savage whom we do not remember having seen before. He is clad in the conventional nothingness, but is adorned with the gayest of feathered headgear. He carries two throwing-spears and a dainty stone mace that would cause complete anæsthesia in an elephant. That stone war-club in the hands of a boy of sixteen would spoil a whole day for us, if he could wield it, but in the hands of the six-foot savage who fashioned it for real use it is positively ruinous.

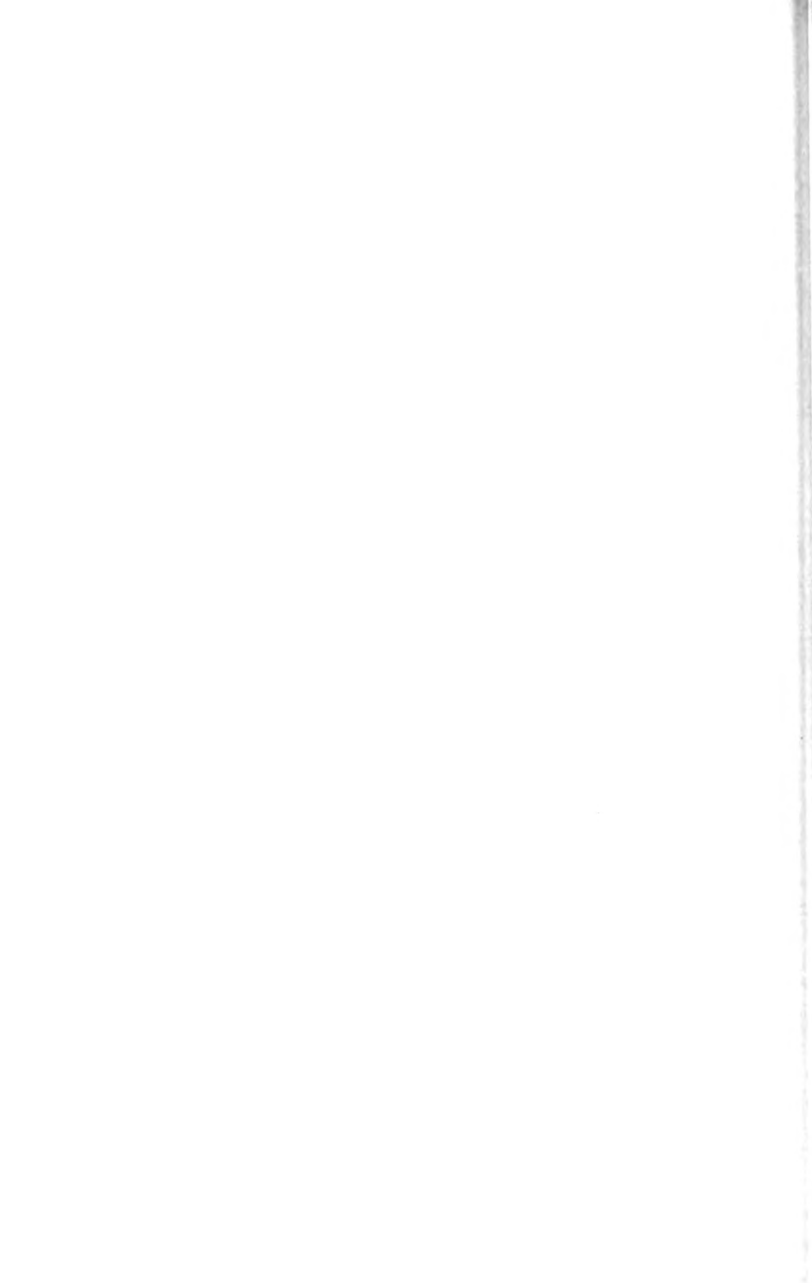
The black man greets us with a grunt. That grunt may mean anything, we tell ourselves, and proceed to translate it as one of friendliness and welcome. By means of the sign language we endeavor to convey the fact that we are come as friends and are paying our duty call in return for the kindly interest shown us only this morn-



We made presents of tin jewelry to the natives, but what they wanted was tobacco



Feathered head-dresses moving through the tall grass told us of the natives watching our progress toward the kampong



ing. During our Delsarte exercises others of the clan approach to gaze at us with suspicious eyes, and Moh, who carries the cameras and a box of tin trinkets intended for the women, draws closer to our heels.

Evidently our meaning becomes clear to them, for they unbend a little and a smile flits over some of the paint-besmeared visages that now surround us. We have come to make some presents to the women, for they rule the kam-pongs, but just now they are nowhere in sight. We ask for them, and loud chatter ensues. At first the men seem a little dubious as to our intentions, but by showing them a package of tobacco and indicating that they have already tasted of our generosity we make them understand that we merely wish to present the women with a token of our good-will.

One of the crowd is despatched by the chief to round up the timorous females and after some delay they appear, huddled in a hand-holding group, at the other end of the village, which end they firmly refuse to leave. It is beneath the

dignity of a white man to go to the native, so we simply stand and wait, though with apparent annoyance. The chief—or, as they call him, *kapala kampong*—senses that we are somewhat miffed at the reluctance of the women and takes things into his own hands. Turning toward the women, he bellows to them to come immediately. The commands of the chief in matters of this kind seem to carry some weight, for the women saunter in our direction, trying to appear coyly indifferent, but probably scared. Finally, when they have entered the circle of men which opens to receive them, we break the silence and turn to Moh with a request for the box of trinkets. In it are gold-washed bracelets and chains that glitter enticingly in the sunlight, and we expect the women to break into cries of extreme delight when we open it. We are not a little surprised, as we display the contents, at the utter lack of enthusiasm; even when we go so far as to place the necklaces upon them, the women merely regard the trinkets with mild curiosity.

Our little *coup de maître* has fallen flat, so to

speak. One of the dusky damsels relieves the situation for us. She is inclined to be forward, but this we do not think of censuring, for it saves the day. She says in very good Malay, "*Ada rocco?*" It is tobacco they want. Luckily, we have a little with us and when it is distributed among the ladies, who immediately fill their mouths with it, diplomatic relations are opened. They seem ready to entertain almost any proposal, within reason, that we may make. We seize the opportunity to impress upon them that as long as we are their guests and are treated as such, each member of the tribe will receive his or her daily ration of tobacco. All this palaver, carried on as it is in the sign language, takes time, but the savages seem to catch our meaning with increasing facility. Yes, we are getting along famously. We even essay the making of a photograph or two, but the cameras are regarded with suspicion, so we desist and let the matter rest until we shall have become better acquainted. There will, no doubt, be plenty of time for picture-taking.

96 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

With a sweeping gesture, we indicate the rest of the kampong, and the chief, not to be outdone in generosity, gives us the key to the city by means of an all-embracing wave of his arm. This is as it should be, and we thank him, with a "we-expected-as-much" air, and proceed to inspect the entire place. In fact, the only one of us who does not seem to be quite at ease is Moh. He is having a bad day.



Twice we encounter stalwart warriors standing like sentinels, as though disdainful of concealment



The body is placed in a sitting position after being gaily decorated for the funeral

CHAPTER VIII

WE TAKE UP QUARTERS IN THE KAMPONG

OUR first visit has turned out so well and the natives seem so friendly that there seems to be no reason why we should not move camp so as to be near them and thus save a long hike through the jungle every time we wish to see them. A walk through the jungle is the occasion of a fight with mosquitos, particularly at this time of year, February, which is the beginning of the rainy season. With the assistance of several of the younger men we transfer our belongings from the beach to the kampong and settle down for a long visit. This kampong is as good as any to study the natives in and the inhabitants seem fairly trustworthy.

Our tent is placed, this time, between two of the large family shacks, and after a day or two

we begin to feel quite at home. The natives do not interfere with us, and as we are careful not to impose upon them, all is well. The first night of our stay in the kampong is one of sadness for the natives, we find, for one of their very old men has passed away in its course. He has been ailing a long time, they tell us, and it has surprised them all that he should last so long. They are very much like civilized people in the affection they appear to feel for any sick or ailing member of their immediate family.

We stumble upon a Kia Kia mourning party quite unexpectedly. When one of these people dies the body is placed in a sitting posture in the spot where death overtook him, if that is in the house, and his nearest relatives decorate him with fresh paint and feathers. There is no wailing while the body is kept in the house. One or two members of his family hold a vigil beside him and fan the flies away, while others go to the burial ground to prepare the grave. This is usually about six feet deep, but as the body must be placed within it seated there is a shelf built

QUARTERS IN THE KAMPONG 99

two feet from the bottom on which the deceased rests. When the grave is ready—and its preparation may consume three or four days—the body is transferred to it with much solemnity. The grave is not filled with earth, but a framework covered with a heavy thatch of palm-leaves is placed over the dead and the earth is piled to a depth of two feet on that. As the body is lowered into the grave the relatives begin a quavering chant and all present seem to feel deeply the loss of their kinsman.

They surround their burial places with strong fences, for if any one were to walk across a grave he must inevitably break through its thin, ill-supported top, which would be disconcerting, to say the least. One of our neighbor's pigs, an exceptionally large and heavy one, one day wanders into the cemetery and, judging from the howl of wrath that ensues, raises havoc in the graveyard. At any rate, when the noise has quieted down, the pig is dead, and for some reason it is buried in the grave it has just spoiled.

100 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

The death of the old man casts a gloom over the entire kampong and for a few days we leave the inhabitants to their own devices. The few kodak pictures we have snapped aroused their resentment to such an extent that we have decided discretion to be the better part of destitution. We fill diaries, these days, with notes of happenings observed from a discreet distance.

One of the things that comes to our notice is the way the women gather cocoanuts. When the family larder is low, one of the men will call the attention of one of the women to the fact and she dutifully prepares to replenish the stock. Her preparations are interesting. It is a considerable distance straight up in the air to the crown of a full-bearing cocoanut-palm, and the nuts cluster well up in the lower fronds about forty feet from the ground. The tapering trunk offers a good grip for the legs and one could climb it easily by simply clasping the legs about it after the fashion of our own boyhood, but the Kia Kia has a method all his own.

When about to ascend the trunk, the woman



The native climbs a cocoanut-palm in a series of humps and stretches, like a giant inch-worm



Making fire. A piece of hard wood is rotated by hand while in contact with a softer piece

first gathers a bunch of long grass which she twists into a rope and ties snugly about her ankles. This done, the feet are placed against the trunk of the palm, with the soles gripping it, while the grass binding on the ankles serves as the fulcrum of a lever of which the lower leg forms the long end. The legs are bowed outward so that with set muscles a surprising grip is obtained. With the feet in this position, the arms grasp the trunk and lift the body upward six or eight inches and the legs are drawn up to a higher position. In this manner the native proceeds upward like a great inchworm, in a series of humps and stretches. When the top is reached one hand only is clasped around the trunk, while the other twists the nuts off their stems. This is done by merely grasping the lower surface of the nut and rotating it until the fibers of the stem are broken. The nut is then allowed to drop to the ground, where it lands with a thud and a bounce that make one shudder at the thought of what it might do were it to land squarely upon one's head. When a suffi-

cient number of ripe nuts are gathered, the woman descends the trunk much as she climbed upward, though this seems to be a more arduous undertaking. Apparently, however, this is due to fatigue rather than to the actual difficulty of climbing down, for these people have no stamina and seem to tire quickly.

The cocoanut supplies both food and drink to the Kia Kia. True, he eats many other things, but the flesh of this fruit is the great staple, the others being sago cake, surf-fish, wild pig, bush kangaroo, and "long pig" (human flesh), the use of each being in ratio to the order named. When a Kia Kia is thirsty he goes to the pile of nuts beside the house and selects one that appeals to him, walks to a shady place, and leisurely sits down. He places the nut between his feet, which are drawn well against the body, and with a deft blow of his stone war-club breaks the thick husk at the small end of the nut. This he grips in his teeth and peels off, holding the nut between his palms, with his elbows raised. After the husk is removed one blow of the club opens the

end of the nut and the cool water is attainable.

The Kia Kias do not drink. That is, they do not drink in the sense that we use the term. When a Kia Kia desires water, he wants it in sufficient volume to wet his throat and stomach at one and the same instant, so he simply throws back his head, opens his gullet, and without swallowing lets the fluid run in and down. It goes down in one continuous stream. Nowhere in the world can one see a similar operation. It is absolutely unique and all Kia Kias have the same drinking—let us call it technique.

Their sago is prepared in a simple manner. The palm from which the starch is derived is indigenous to their jungles, and we are told that one large trunk of, say, two-foot thickness and twenty-foot length will supply food for four persons for a year. When sago is to be prepared a palm is felled and the pithy center is scraped from it, macerated with pestles, and soaked in water. The water dissolves the starch content and, when evaporated, leaves the starch ready for immediate consumption.

104 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

The moist starch is molded into cakes which are dried bone-dry, and in this form it seems to keep indefinitely. In preparation for eating, the cake is simply softened with water and toasted over a fire until cooked sufficiently to suit the individual taste. With the exception of the surf-fish, the other articles of Kia Kia diet are seldom eaten except on some special occasion, as at a feast. The surf-fish are gathered with each full tide, but of course only the natives on the sea-coast get these. They are always cooked, never eaten raw. In fact, the Kia Kias eat everything but cocoanut cooked, and even cook that sometimes.

The heads of enemies, both animal and human, are kept as trophies denoting the prowess of the hunter or warrior. Boar tusks are made into armlets, and the greatness of a hunter is easily determined by the number of these that adorn his arms. In the case of a human enemy the head is severed from the body and smoked after the brains have been removed. It is kept carefully, within the house of the man who collected

it, until the ravages of time and multitudinous insects have removed the last remaining traces of dried flesh from it, and it then becomes a mural decoration for the house or graces the doorway of the shack. In the case of the human enemy the body is always eaten; that is, when the feast can be compassed with no great danger of news of the orgy coming to the ears of the punishing white men who rule the country. These feasts are becoming increasingly infrequent, but cannibalism still exists and perhaps a dozen cases yearly are brought to the attention of the authorities. For each of the cases that come to the notice of the Assistant in Merauke there are many that never come to light, for the natives have held them in great secrecy of late.

The skulls of deceased foemen sometimes litter up the place to such an extent that the children play with them as with toys, and one little black rascal—the son of the chief, by the way—seems to take a particular delight in hearing his mother describe the affrays in which his father collected them. We are so fortunate as

to get a snap-shot of her entertaining the youngster in this way, and later secure one of the little shaver trying to pile them one upon the other, like one of our kiddies at play with building-blocks. He is so engrossed in his attempt to balance them that he fails to notice that we are taking his picture.

As the savages have no matches, they obtain fire in a crude but very practical way. It takes several of them to do it, for they do not care to exert themselves much. In a piece of soft, very dry wood they make a small indentation into which they insert the point of a thin, round stick of ironwood or similar hard, close-grained wood three or four feet in length. Holding the stick between the palms of their hands, they rotate it rapidly, meanwhile pressing it into the softer wood, the pulverized fiber of which finally ignites from the friction. When the wood dust is smoldering, small bits of dried tinder are piled around it and the whole is blown gently into flame. The operation consumes about twenty

QUARTERS IN THE KAMPONG 107

minutes and on account of this and the labor involved their household fires are seldom allowed to go out; but a supply of the soft wood is kept on hand for use in an emergency.

The Kia Kias are extremely lazy, we find; in many little ways they show that they will not exert themselves in the slightest if they can avoid doing so. If one of them is walking along and happens to see something lying on the ground that he desires, will he stoop to pick it up? Never! He simply grasps the object between his great and second toe and raises the foot to his hand, and he does it gracefully, never losing his poise or missing his stride.

On an afternoon, shortly after the heat of mid-day, the men gather in the shade of the cocoas back of the kampong to discuss the latest scandal or politics. Inasmuch as the kapala kampong, or chief, holds his position solely by the sufferance of the others, or possibly because of some trait of natural leadership inherent in him, changes in administration frequently occur. These are in the main caused by the chief's form-

ing a liaison with the wife or daughter of another influential member of the tribe without giving sufficient remuneration. Then the fight is on. It takes the form of lengthy diatribes by the injured party and much muckraking. The daily papers (the ladies) drop in to listen at first and then monopolize the conversation, as is the general custom elsewhere. They settle the argument, for they get in the last word. Here in Kia Kia Land the women literally "run the ranch." It behooves the aspirant for leadership to stand well with them, for in the end it is their will that is done. The only thing that the women have not been successful in is to make the men work. They often make them fight, but it is much easier for them to do the chores themselves than to try to force the men to do them. Hence, all Kia Kia men are gentlemen of leisure.

As the heat is almost intolerable under our tent, we, too, withdraw to the grateful shade of the fringe of the jungle, and they clear a space for us most genially. There is a little



One little fellow takes great delight in hearing his mother describe the battles in which his father collected his trophies



After the heat of midday the men gather in the shade to discuss the latest scandal or politics

group of them sitting on our left. What they are doing is very interesting. They are eating dried mud. That's it,—just plain dried mud. We hardly believe it when first it comes to our notice, but upon close examination—and invitation, too, to join them—we find it to be true. The dirt is a sort of heavy yellow clay, of which they have several large chunks. From time to time one or another of them breaks off a portion and crumbles off pieces the size of a thimble which he munches with apparent relish. The dogs, of which there are many, sit within the circle of the group and with hungry eyes watch the proceedings. They refuse the clay if it is offered them, but continue to gaze at their masters just as though they thought the men were fooling them and were in reality eating something palatable to the canine taste.

The clay is washed down with copious drafts of cocoanut water taken a pint at a—well, “irrigation” is the only word that seems to suit the process. In response to our stumbling inquiries as to why they eat dirt, they indicate that it is

110 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

bagoose, or good for them. We come to the conclusion that it must supply some mineral substance otherwise lacking in their diet.

Some of the men are busy with their toilets. They are all fops when it comes to personal appearance. Several of them are sitting upon their haunches or with outstretched legs, with the inner lid of a Malay tobacco-box held upright for a mirror, busy with a lip-stick of bamboo upon which is smeared a mixture of lime and water. This they spread on in layers of varying thickness; or, if the whim strikes them, they will besoot their already dusky skin with black and outline thereon circles composed of white dots and red lines. One dandy, who has been leisurely fashioning a rattan handle for a stone war-club head, pauses in his labor and from the wicker basket or gauntlet on his arm—which, by the way, is his only pocket—takes a small pouch of kangaroo hide containing his war-paint. This is yellow ochre in its native state. Breaking off a fragment of it, he pulverizes it between his palms, then, with the powder heaped equally

QUARTERS IN THE KAMPONG 111

in each hand, bends over in the manner of one about to wash the face and briskly rubs the color over his entire face and neck. The surplus he blows off by protuding the lower lip and exhaling forcibly. His exertion over the club handle evidently started the perspiration and this is his method of powdering his nose.

One Beau Brummel whom we dub "Little Playmate" for lack of a better name, because he is really such a hideous sample of humanity, seems to have some difficulty with his breathing and has removed his nose tubes to inspect his nose. The tubes are slightly over an inch in diameter, but the facility with which he reinserts them in the widely distended sides of the nostrils makes evident the fact that he could wear even larger ones without serious discomfort.

The majority of the women are down at the beach, for it is high tide and the surf-fish are close inshore. The women will bring in many of these queer little fellows, which have an odd habit of puffing themselves up like tightly distended rubber balloons the minute they are

112 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

taken from the water. They are of a bright-blue color when freshly caught, but the delicate hues soon fade, after death, to a somber olive. These fish are considered a delicacy by all of the Malay-speaking peoples, and the Polynesians, too.

As soon as the women return the company in the grove will break up and all will repair to their respective shacks, where they will gather around the fires and roast the fish on spits, eat their sago cake, and at the same time pet the dogs and pigs which wander in and around the family circles, as much at home, and quite as welcome, as any one present. In the waning sunlight of late afternoon these simple groups engaged in homely intercourse at their frugal meals are a pleasing sight. The leaping flames of the firelight cast a ruddy glow over their naked forms, bringing into relief the rugged contours of their torsos and faces. As the evening creeps upon them they drift away, one by one, to the smoke-filled shacks, where the smudge protects them from the mosquitos. By



Eating mud! That's it, just plain, dried mud



"Little Playmate" readjusts his nose-tubes

the time darkness has come they are all inside, where they gossip and carry on for an hour or two before finally falling off to sleep.

Our own meals Moh serves beneath the protecting klambu, which encloses within its spacious tent-like interior our camp table and several folding-chairs. The large gasolene lamp, which is a continual source of wonder to the natives, lights the camp with almost daytime brilliance, and we doubly enjoy our dinner in the cool, refreshing air of early evening.

During the month of February it grows dark shortly after six in Kia Kia Land. As we are continuing the night sentry duty, which entails somewhat broken slumber, the one of us who takes second watch turns in after an after-dinner pipe, while the other mounts guard and for want of better company talks to Moh until that worthy has finished with the dishes. His fears are slowly diminishing, which fact we ascribe in part to the eyes one of the dusky maidens has cast upon him. We have, however,

stopped the incipient affair with threats of dire punishment. Moh has a large respect for our ability to punish and dutifully refrains from returning the amorous glances of the charmer, who finds it convenient to pass the cook-tent every now and then. To complicate matters, she speaks a little Malay. As we keep Moh near us at all times, there is little to fear and we warn him of how her Kia Kia "husband" will prepare him for the roasting-pit without interference from us. Moh tells us volubly how much he loves his *bagoose prempuan* in Jahwa (Java), and we listen with amused tolerance. The Malay does not live that is not susceptible to the charms of the gentler sex, and Moh is no exception.

There is a young moon, and as it rises from the palms that fringe the point that stretches seaward on the left of our camp the dogs gather in what seems to be an indignation meeting. Their howling makes the night hideous. There must be fully a hundred in the pack and each is trying to outdo the others in the most soul-rasp-

ing, blood-curdling oratorio imaginable. This is a nightly occurrence whenever there is a moon and is one of the things that linger long in the memory. In no other place in the world, it seems to us, have we ever heard the equal of these Kia Kia dogs. Their howls might be the wails of long-departed spirits in mourning over their untimely demise and subsequent place upon the menu.

CHAPTER IX

THE STORY OF THE SWISS SCIENTIST

WITH the passing of the days our hosts forget the gloom caused by the death of the old man and resume their usual laughing, care-free demeanor, much to our relief. They spend hours in the shade of our tent, during which time we pick up many of their words,—enough, in fact, to enable us to converse in a limited way with them. Curiously intermingled with the pure words of their somewhat limited vocabulary are many of either pure Malay or Malayan derivation, and the presence of these, we find, helps us greatly.

By writing all their words down phonetically and setting the meaning beside them, we are able to study the language, which is a surprisingly simple one. They have no writing and their means of counting is limited to the ten



The hairdresser plaits long strands of raffia into the kinky wool of the Kia Kias



The shiny inner surface of a Malay tobacco-box serves them as a mirror

digits. All reckoning is done upon the fingers and when they run out of fingers they are hard put to it to continue. However, if the reckoning runs up to, say, thirty or forty, they count one another's fingers and remember the names of those individuals included in the calculation. The task of remembering more than four participant pairs of hands would be beyond the power of their intellects.

At Merauke we heard of the death, under mysterious conditions, of a Swiss scientist who came to study these people about three years ago. With the memory of this incident fresh in our minds, we inquire casually concerning the white man reputed to have been eaten by them, but are met with blank looks or glances of suspicion. Between ourselves, we decide that if it is humanly possible to do so we will find the remains of the unfortunate man, a martyr to scientific progress, and send his bones to his institution in Switzerland. The demeanor of the natives makes us sure that they have guilty knowledge of his death, at least.

Pursuing the matter further, and after having won the confidence of one of the middle-aged men—whom, by the way, we have christened “Intelligence”—we secure an admission that the man died in this very locality, though by what means Intelligence will not divulge. After a good deal of discussion, and deep cogitation on his part, Intelligence agrees to bring all the older men of the kampong to a conference in the afternoon, to discuss ways and means of finding the desired bones, which he says he thinks were buried somewhere in the jungle. He is very reticent, for he says the Tuan at Merauke sent soldiers to find the white man and killed many men when he found that the white man was dead. The only thing that moves Intelligence to admit as much as he does is our story of how the man’s friends at home mourned his loss and how greatly they desire to have his bones to inter properly, according to the customs of their tribe.

Intelligence leaves us, his head bowed in thought. The situation is a grave one and our story of the great mourning caused by the poor

scientist's death, coming so shortly after the death of a member of the tribe, sits heavily upon him. With all their savage characteristics, these primitive men seem to have within them the milk of human kindness. They are creatures of impulse.

While they are debating the thing among themselves, we go for a short excursion in the environs of the camp. In the course of conversations with Intelligence we have learned that in this neighborhood a Jesuit missionary formerly held forth, but that he, also, died, about the same time that the Swiss lost his life. This is interesting, and we are reminded that these people who have been so very cordial to us are really eaters of men and will bear watching. Our attitude toward them is one of firm superiority tempered with kindness, but we are ever watchful for any signs of treachery. As long as the tobacco holds out our relations with them probably will be amicable enough. There is no danger of their trying to take it by force when it is given them gratis daily, and of course they

do not know that our supply is not inexhaustible.

As we stroll along a scarcely discernible path that threads the jungle the mosquitos begin their accustomed attack, and we are thankful to reach a tiny clearing on which the creepers and obliterating growths of the primeval jungle are fast encroaching. When we finally get clear of the thicket and round a large clump of young cocoas, there appears to our astonished eyes a neat palm-thatched structure surmounted with a cross. This, then, is the former missionary's little church, in which he gave up his life while trying to bring the light to these benighted people. For his pains he was eaten.

The door of the little building is closed, though not latched, and the windows are all tightly shut. We go inside and with eyes straining in the darkness try to make out the details of the interior. Everything is just as the poor man left it. Nothing has been touched. The soldiers who came to the place to avenge both

his death and that of the scientist ordered that the natives whom they spared keep away from the place upon pain of another raid, and the black men have declared the place taboo. The church is tenanted now by countless bats, whose noisome bodies render the air fetid with their odor and whose wings almost touch us as they wheel to and fro, roused from their slumber by the opening of the door. Their squeaking remonstrance at being thus disturbed makes the place eery,—like some abode of evil spirits of the nether world,—and we beat a hasty retreat to the sunlight of the clearing outside.

We sit down to rest a moment on a fallen trunk a few yards from the church and try to imagine the emotions of the man who, with total sacrifice of self, came alone to these people to do them only good according to his lights, and who in turn suffered the extreme penalty at their ungrateful hands. What his last thoughts on earth must have been and what he said are part of our conjectures. We find ourselves wondering if he

122 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

was strong enough to say with his last expiring breath, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Mixed with our anger at the Kia Kias as we gaze upon the mute witness to their murderous proclivities, however, there comes pity for their ignorance, and we tell ourselves that their crime was due to savage ignorance and a natural hunting-instinct for the animal food their bodies crave. Man-eating is their custom, and this is their country, and it is reasonable to expect that some lives must be sacrificed before they can be shown the error of their way,—error in our eyes, but not in theirs to whom the land belongs. We whites have become so accustomed to taking that which we desire from those not gifted with the power for sheer conquest which our cultural progression has produced and which gives us our feeling of superiority to others, that, filled with self-importance, we must needs seek lands afar belonging to others, farm them regardless of the owners' remonstrances, and then add insult to injury by punishing these owners for continuing

in their age-old practices. There are two sides to the question. True, there is no doubt that our civilization is the better,—for us. They have not found it so for them. Laurence Hope has said the Creator, after molding One, sublimely perfect, “doubtless in some idle moment mixed the forces that fashioned me.”

Our kodaks perpetuate the little church for us and we leave it with no regret, for it does not engender the most pleasant of thoughts. When we return to camp, we find that our intermediary, Intelligence, has arranged for the conference earlier than was expected, and that the others are ready to gather at our pleasure. There is no time like the present, so we tell him to summon his clan that we may start the pow-wow.

We place our chairs under the shade of the fly at the rear of our tent and soon the older men begin to drift toward us. They seat themselves in a semicircle facing us and at a distance of ten or fifteen feet. When all are seated, Intelligence begins a long harangue,—a torrent of

124 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

words which fall from his lips so fast that they are wholly unintelligible to us. His discourse is received coldly by some of his fellows, but one or two—those who have seemed most friendly to us—take kindly to our plan, judging from the expression on their faces.

A hot debate ensues. After several hours of earnest palaver in which we take no part, Intelligence turns to us and signifies that he would like us to speak on the subject. This we do, assuring them that the Dutch Government has no part in our plan, and that if they will deliver the bones of the Swiss to us we will guarantee that no punishment whatever shall befall the members of the community. We draw as vivid a picture of the scientist's grieving relatives as is possible with our limited vocabulary, and at length prevail upon the savage assembly to promise to bring the poor man's bones to camp upon the morrow.

Our apparent victory, has not, however, been achieved without the exchange of some very black looks among several of the Kia Kias.



The deserted Jesuit mission which formerly was the pride and hope of its unfortunate builder



In the early evening the women sit around on the copra drying platforms and watch the sunset

STORY OF SWISS SCIENTIST 125

There are still a few who remain firm in their belief that this is some trick of the white man's to make them incriminate themselves. Upon the decision of the majority to hand over the remains to the white men, the meeting breaks up and all but Intelligence leave for their respective quarters. He lingers to tell us that he, himself, will bring the bones in to-morrow afternoon. So grateful are we that we present him with a shiny trade hatchet and an American trench mirror. He departs with many thanks.

The request we have made has caused a stir in the kampong and the accustomed afternoon meeting in the shade of the grove back of the village does not take place. A few of the younger people gather there for their usual enjoyment of one another's society, but the elders are all grouped about their doorways, earnestly discussing something. Now and then speculative glances in our direction tell us that we are the chief topic of conversation. Moh is distinctly uneasy.

In the very outer fringe of the grove, and

directly back of our tent, there is a little knot of young men and women who are apparently very much interested in something which is screened from our view by the intervening bodies of the watchers. We do not wish to miss anything unusual, so we hasten over to see what is taking place. From the extreme absorption of the onlookers and the absence of the laughter and gaiety which usually attend these gatherings we know that something of moment is under way.

An amazing sight greets our eyes. Lying at full length upon the ground is a young woman of perhaps eighteen years, undergoing what must be the most exquisite torture. Ah, what woman will not endure to be in fashion! At work upon her quivering body is an ancient crone, who with a sharpened piece of shell is cutting deep cicatrices in the flesh of the abdomen. The girl undergoing the operation is bearing with stoic courage the pain it must cost her, though her face twists and her muscles contract in a spasmodic tremor each time the old woman gashes her. The artist is cutting a scar pattern, which

is the highest type of personal adornment these people know. The cuts are made diagonally underneath the skin and to a depth of a full quarter of an inch, so that as each is made there is a flap of skin turned up which varies from a thin edge to a thickness equal to the full depth of the cut.

The poor girl looks as if she regrets having asked that the thing be done, but, having started, is afraid of ridicule unless she goes through with it. The others gaze upon her with varying expressions. Some of the very young girls are palpably envious, while those whose bodies are similarly adorned are commiserating in demeanor; they know the pain the girl is suffering. The men look on with indifference, though they offer suggestions now and then as to how to enhance the beauty of the design. As each cut is made, a handful of dirt is scooped up from the ground and rubbed well into the wound, care being taken to fill the cut to its fullest depth.

Eight cuts have been made when the girl decides that she can stand no more at the present

and the old woman desists after carefully patting the edges of the wounds and applying broad, fresh green leaves to them as a dressing. These are held in place by thongs of kangaroo hide bound around the body. The purpose of the dirt rubbed into the wounds is to make them fester and thereby raise the great wales that are so admired by the Kia Kias.

As the girl rises stiffly to her feet, the men present look at us with approbative grins and nod their satisfaction. The decoration of this particular girl promises well, for the old woman who has been doing the work is acknowledged to be an artist at it, and one of the girls whose scars have long since healed displays those upon her body, calling to our attention proofs of the fine technique. She obligingly poses for our cameras and in return for her kindness we present her with an extra allowance of tobacco.

CHAPTER X

OUR CONSOLATION PRIZE

IN our land the advent of a new member of the household is usually the occasion of much todo. There are many whispered conferences and grave speculations as to the advisability of this or that, and in many cases Mother is summoned as mistress of ceremonies. Wife's sister also may attend and shuffle you unceremoniously out of the way of the trained nurse that bustles by, redolent of some carbolic derivative, and utterly unconscious of your existence. You who thought that you were in some remote way interested, and at least partly responsible for the commotion, are thrown temporarily into the discard and sometimes permanently so.

This is not the case in Kia Kia households. There is no trained nurse. There is no anæsthetic. Father's feelings are not ruffled, for

130 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

he may at the moment be putting on his last coat of ochre or having his hair re-dressed. Indeed, the farrowing of the family sow is of greater moment, for the little pigs may be eaten, while the new human arrival may not. True, after the child is born, it is the object of much affection, but its actual advent is a matter that concerns the mother only. In rare cases, we find, some friend of her own sex does attend, but this is by no means the rule.

A young woman who we know is about to become a mother has just passed our tent on her way into the jungle. She is going there alone. Something in her demeanor tells us that this is to be the natal morning of a new member of the tribe and the other women's calls to her, as she wends her way up the pathway, are significant. We question Intelligence, who is fast becoming our instructor in things Kia Kia, and he describes to us the method by which these savage mothers bring their offspring into the world. With them nature takes its natural course. There have been no displacements of internal organs in these

women of the wilds, as there has been in our women who wear tight corsets and destroy the natural poise of the body and loins with high-heeled shoes.

When the woman we have just seen arrives at a place she has prepared the day previous, where she knows she will be left severely alone, she merely lies down and awaits her labor. When the new little being has entered the big outside world in its natural, unassisted way, and the proper time has come, it is the mother who handles the only instrument used in the case,—a sharp sea-shell. She tenderly wraps the child in broad leaves to protect its tender skin from insects, and within an hour, or at most two, after the actual birth she returns proudly to the kampong, carrying the little one, which is the object of much attention from then on.

As Intelligence finishes his description one of his friends comes to the tent and tells him that he is wanted elsewhere. Without excuse or good-by, he rises and follows his friend away, leaving us for the time being to our own devices.

132 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

The women of the shack nearest our tent are engaged in making *attaps*. These are the thatch coverings with which the natives roof their homes. The process is an interesting one and merits description. Several bundles of cocoanut fronds have been gathered, and it is from these that the women make the rain-proof roof sections. The midrib of each of the fronds is stripped of the narrow sagittate leaves, split to render it less thick and bulky, and cut into lengths of approximately four feet. The leaves are then taken one by one and after being bent over the split midrib are sewn upon it with fibers stripped from the stiff outer skin of the rib. As the fronds selected have leaves nearly thirty inches long, the section of attap when complete is about fourteen inches wide and is as long as the stick which holds it together and supports it in position when put to use. The leaves overlap one another and in consequence the attaps will shed the hardest of the hard rains for which these latitudes are noted. Not only are they admirable shelter from inclement weather, but they are a great



The men occupy their time with revision of their toilets, rather than in doing the chores



Sarah

protection from the tropical sun which beats fiercely during most of the year upon these shores. Nature is kind to these people, for their every want is supplied by her from a vast storehouse close at hand.

An interested observer of the making of the attaps is the ample Sarah, the wabbly-fleshed sow that resides in our neighbor's shack. We call her Sarah, for that is the closest approximation our language affords to her real name as pronounced by the natives.

Sarah finally decides that enough attaps have been completed for the nonce and with porcine indifference to the plans of others deposits herself with many wheedling grunts directly in front of one of the older women and also upon the attap she is finishing. The woman roars with laughter. She calls the attention of the others to Sarah's appropriation of the spot and Sarah adds to the conversation several louder grunts, as though demanding attention. The woman slaps Sarah fondly upon her swelling ham and proceeds to perform the operation that the big

creature has come to enjoy. Taking a short piece of one of the midribs, she scratches Sarah's back, which brings from the sow grunts of grateful approval.

Moh has struck a deal with one of the women whereby we are kept supplied with cocoanuts, which formerly were brought to us daily but of late have been coming in decreasing numbers. He gives in return for five cocoanuts one empty tomato can or a canned-corn tin. He has an eye to business and the girl who made eyes at him a few days ago is now his customer. Judging from his very businesslike attitude toward her, he has discovered something unattractive about her. A young and very fearsome Kia Kia spends a great deal of his time in her company.

Our safety razors are a great curiosity to the men, who shave in what to us would be a most unpleasant way. They pluck their beards with tweezers made of brass, of which there are several pairs in the kampong. These are relics of former visits of Malay traders who come to the coast during the calm season. When we shave,

there invariably cluster around, to watch the operation, a group of wondering men who shake their heads as though the ways and implements of the white men were beyond their comprehension. Our shoes are a source of amusement to them, for they cannot understand why one should wish to incase the feet in such stiff, unyielding contraptions. Our other clothing they admire greatly, and one of them proudly wears one of our discarded shirts. The typewriter is a continual source of wonder, for they sense the use to which it is put and are awed by it as much as by anything that we possess.

Though it is midday, it suddenly grows dark and we go outside the tent, where just a little while ago the glare was almost blinding. The entire sky is overcast, and we see that we are to taste of a regular tropical storm,—the first, in fact, that we have experienced since landing. The wind is moaning through the palms in rapidly rising key, and the surf not far distant is pounding upon the beach with a menacing roar. As the wind rises the natives scurry around,

gathering up their belongings, and the children take to cover with cries of alarm. Even the dogs slink through the little openings in the house fronts that are cut for their especial use and in a surprisingly short space of time the kampong is deserted.

We make a hurried examination of the guy-ropes of our tent and tighten some of those that are loose.

The wind is fast becoming a hurricane and if it were not for the shelter of the surrounding palms the tent would be blown flat in an instant. As it is, however, it stands the tempest pretty well. The rain bursts upon us without warning, obliterating from view the grove behind the tent. The cocoas are thrashing wildly to and fro in a frenzy that makes us wonder how they stand it. The torrential rain floods the kampong, which for a few moments resembles a lake in which the houses are entirely surrounded with water. A terrific peal of thunder follows one of the most vivid of lightning-flashes and above the drumming patter of the rain and the howling



The *kapala kampong* presents us with human skulls, the highest token of their esteem



A young and very fearsome Kia Kia spends a great deal of his time with her

of the wind we hear the shrieks of the frightened children in the shack next to us.

The thirsty soil drinks up the moisture rapidly, and soon after the rain ceases, which is scarcely ten minutes from the time the storm broke, the ground is free of puddles. The air is cool and refreshing and there is a clean smell in it that is invigorating. The sun comes out again and the rain-washed palms take on a brighter green, as though some accommodating painter had touched them up anew.

Our tent has shed the water perfectly, and we and our belongings are as dry as one could wish. Shortly after the storm we have a visitor. It is Intelligence. He brings with him our gifts of yesterday. These he tenders us with downcast countenance, telling us at the same time that he cannot find the bones of the Tuan.

His abject sorrow at disappointing us is evidence that he has met with utter failure, though from what cause we are not sure. Very likely it is on account of the opposition encountered from the other natives. As we feel that his ef-

forts in our behalf merit some token of our appreciation, we tell him that he may keep the articles and he withdraws, anxious to get away and cover his chagrin. Our hopes of securing the remains of the Swiss must be abandoned.

Our disappointment is to be tempered, however, for in a short time signs of life are evident in the spaces before the houses and we note that drums are being tuned, feathered ornaments donned, and an air of expectancy pervades the village. We recognize the signs as preparations for a feast, and the loud squealing of a pig, ending abruptly, somewhere back of the house, is conclusive evidence that a jollification is planned.

Shortly before nightfall a delegation of natives waits upon us and requests that we follow them to the beach. This we do, wondering the while what is in progress; but as the men are most friendly in their behavior, we feel sure that whatever it is, it is planned for our entertainment. Arriving at the beach, we find the men of the kampong assembled and as we step from the palms they raise their voices in a chant of wel-

come. With all the wild savagery of the scene it is strangely thrilling. As we approach they spread out and arrange themselves in a large circle around a forked stick from which hang two human skulls. We are led to the center of the circle where, after an impressive speech by the kapala kampong, we are presented with the skulls. These are a token of highest esteem and we accept them as such,—and, too, as a sort of consolation prize for our disappointment of an hour ago. Moh snaps a picture of the ceremony for us, but remarks when returning the kodak:

“Tuan, ini gamber tida biak, Sahya korang preska brapa, Tuan. [Master, this picture is not good; I do not know how, Master.]”

As it turns out, however, Moh got the picture.

CHAPTER XI

THE FEAST

THE presentation of skulls is but the prelude to a great entertainment. It has been planned for our especial benefit. As a sort of opening chorus and introductory number, we are entertained with the Kia Kia song of welcome as the circle of witnesses to the skull-presentation ceremony breaks up.

The medicine man—who, by the way, is supposed to hold communion with the spirits that every native believes inhabit the jungle—leads in the opening number, which is an ensemble of all the adult males of the kampong. He is attended by two others, who circle around him with heads bowed, rattling castanets made of the great pincers of the crayfish with which the coast abounds. These have a sound which reminds one of the never-to-be forgotten but hard-to-



The circle breaks up and a dance takes place for our entertainment



They sang for us at the top of their leather lungs

describe warning of the diamond-back crotalus or rattlesnake of America.

The medicine man is grotesque with his barbaric adornments. Surmounting his head and securely fastened to his ordinary headdress, is a fish carved of wood, of a light pithy variety. The fish is nearly two feet in length and though its general color is white, the markings representing its fins and eyes are in red. As the man walks it bobs up and down in a funny way as though nodding its approval of the ceremony. While the medicine man and his feather-bedecked attendants perform their dance with extreme gravity, the others who are at some distance in the background, nearer the water's edge, stride up and down the beach in close formation, singing at the top of their lungs a refrain that seems to be a continuous repetition of perhaps a dozen notes.

They walk briskly ten or twelve yards past the little group of three in the foreground and then reverse, those who had been in the rear now becoming the leaders, and walk an equal distance

142 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

to the other side of the medicine man. Meanwhile, the song goes on and the castanets continue their dry, menacing rattle. We watch them for a space of ten minutes, but after that the dance begins to grow monotonous. The thump of the drums keeps up with mechanical precision the even rhythm of the walking-dance. The performance becomes a bore. While the dance is still in progress we leave the beach to return to the camp. Once warmed up, as they now are, they will continue to dance without interruption for hours. As the older men become fatigued they will drop out and younger ones take their place. When they have rested sufficiently, they will return, and so the dance goes on.

While the men are dancing the women are not idle. The fires are burning brightly in the kampong and over them the girls are roasting fish and sago cakes, while three women are carefully turning the pig that squealed this afternoon, in a pit dug for the purpose of roasting

him according to their method. The pit is filled with red-hot stones, we find upon examination, and the odor that rises from the place makes us hungry. We begin to wonder how we can refuse to partake of his porkship, for we know that they will surely offer us some of the meat. That pig, like all their others, has been too careless in its diet to suit us as food, no matter how delicious the cooking may smell. In order that we may have some semblance of an excuse to refuse the meat we order Moh to watch the roasting and have our dinner ready to serve the moment the pig is ready for the natives. We can then plead satiety without hurting their feelings.

As it happens, we are able to evade the issue gracefully, for the women take the food to the dancers on the beach, where they line up and receive it upon broad palm-leaves the women provide for the purpose. When all have eaten, the dancing is resumed. A great fire is built on the sand and the dance goes on in its light,—the most savage scene imaginable. Though our

144 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

hosts began the party in our honor, now all are joining in for the sheer pleasure it gives them, with no thought of us.

After our dinner we go down and watch them for an hour before turning in. As the excitement heightens the affair becomes a wild orgy in which all participate, and we beat a hasty retreat to the chaste seclusion of our tent, there to conjure sleep in the midst of this most unholy uproar.

Long into the night the mad festival continues, until one by one the participants drop out from utter exhaustion and make their way to the shacks, where they gossip in loud tones, much to our annoyance.

The sun is overhead when the natives emerge the next day. Unaccustomed to violent exercise such as that of the night before, some of them wearily drag themselves to the shade of the groves with the air of persons trying to show signs of animation merely to save their friends the trouble of a funeral.

The women seem to be absolutely fagged out,



Long into the night the mad festival continues. To exert themselves in any productive occupation to a like extent would kill them



The drums are tuned in a peculiar manner. Having no strings fastened to the heads with which to tighten them, they place small lumps of resin mixed with clay on the heads to produce the desired sound

and their feet drag as they prepare food for the men. There is little to interest one in the kampong to-day, but later on, when the heat of mid-day is past, the women gather in groups to prepare *wady*, the fermented drink of the Kia Kias. Its preparation is neither nice nor sanitary. The female of the species being more deadly than the male, the women macerate in their mouths the ingredients of the drink, to extract the juices. For the killing mixture that produces wady, they chew up cocoanut meat, certain roots and leaves they gather in the jungle, and the acrid outer husk of the cocoanut.

This juice mixed with saliva is diluted with water and stored in gourds. It is allowed to ferment, enough sago starch being added to aid the process. After the mixture has stood a day or two in the heat of the sun, it has sufficient "kick" to floor a mule. While the wady is ripening the kampong rests and visitors from a distant kampong drop in to attend the coming wady party, for an invitation has been sent them by messenger.

While the feast was in progress there seems to have developed a real love-affair between two members of the community. They have decided that they are for each other and that henceforth they will live together. The decision is a momentous one, for it involves a ceremony so utterly incomprehensible to the white man that we are aghast at its unbridled license.

According to Kia Kia ideas, a woman, to remain true to her husband, must have removed from her mind any desire for male companionship other than his. She therefore must submit herself to every man of her tribe before the marriage is recognized. This ceremony is made the occasion for an orgy, and though the participants are severely punished by the Dutch officials when discovered, it is still in vogue clandestinely.

It is due to this that many of the women prefer to remain single and free to choose. Those who undergo the frightful ordeal are never molested, we are told. Indeed, it is said that two out of every five women succumb after such an experience. Preparations are in progress for

the ceremony, which is to take place this evening, and the bride is even now adorning herself with feathered finery and besmearing her dusky body with oil and paint. After night has settled down, all the natives repair to a clearing where the drums are calling and a huge fire is built. The occasion is one of merriment and the ceremony continues far into the night.

The day that the wady is ready the natives gather in the shade for the express purpose of becoming thoroughly and most comfortably inebriated. As the liquor begins to take effect they dance and sing. While they dance more wady is given them, until they are overcome and perforce must stagger away and lie down. Soon they fall asleep, not to waken until late the next day, when they experience the most depressing of "mornings after." By this time the wady is all gone, and, too, there is no ice-water! After a wady party of this kind the men do not fully recover for days, for the stuff is almost paralyzing in its effect.

CHAPTER XII

THE HEAD DANCE

IT seems that while the wady party was in progress something occurred that aroused the ire of one or two of the older women of the kampong. The visitors who came to partake of the cup that cheers partook of something else, not on the program, and this occasioned a great deal of discussion, conducted mainly by the wife of the injured party.

A very fine stone club turned up missing, so to speak, and the family wealth was thus greatly depleted. While the loss is of moment, the men are inclined to pass the matter over, but this is not the case with the women. Things have been going too smoothly of late, and they desire some real diversion. The feast just held has served but to whet their appetite for excitement and they demand that the men go to the other kam-



The Dutch officials punish them severely for indulging in these practices



The Head Dance. Two girls begin it by slowly walking up and down in the center of the circle of onlookers

pong and either secure the stolen club, which took so many weary hours in the making, or collect other indemnity. At the threat that all the women will hold themselves aloof until the demand is obeyed, the men go on what purports to be a friendly visit and actually do return two days later with the stolen club.

Our interest is aroused, and Intelligence is questioned as to what would have happened had the thieving member of the neighboring tribe failed to return the weapon. In the course of his long-winded reply he tells us many things of interest.

His description of the fights in which he has taken part, himself, and the manner in which the Kia Kia warrior goes after "long pig," is given so naïvely that it is a pity one cannot repeat it in Intelligence's inimitable way.

When pig is scarce and there has been no fresh meat in the kampong for a long time, he says, the old women begin to whine and complain that the hunters are no good, and if they are unable to bring in meat after a long, hard hunt-

ing-trip, the women gather in a clearing and make wady. When the wady is ready the men are called to the clearing and each receives a small portion, but not enough to make him at all hilarious. The younger women then gather in the center of the circle of men, who are sitting cross-legged around the edge of the open space, and dance.

At first the dancing is done quietly, merely to amuse the men, and some of the younger men beat the drums and sing. The men under the stimulating influence of the wady join in, singing at the top of their voices, their bodies swaying to and fro to the time of the music. When all are singing, the old women, who have been waiting for the party to reach this stage, bring from the houses all the smoked human heads that they have on hand, decorated with bird-of-paradise feathers for the occasion. These they give to the youngest and most comely of the dancers, although in some cases the old women themselves swing into the moving throng, and, after marching up and down with measured tread

for a time, finally break into a wild dance, swinging the heads in their hands.

They screech and scream the praises of their warrior ancestors and reproach the men present. As the dance goes on they grow hysterical, and it becomes a frenzied whirl of twisting, contorting women, who swing around the circle and thrust into the men's faces the heads they carry, upbraiding them for their laziness and inability to bring in meat for their women. They again threaten the men with total exclusion from all intercourse with themselves and with promises and cajolery seek to rouse them from their apathy.

Here and there in the circle are a few men who by their tense attitude and sparkling eyes show the women that their interest is awakened. The women play up to these and by means of blood-curdling screeches and much waving of the grisly trophies excite the men to the point where they leap to their feet and join the dance. Some of them take the heads themselves and endeavor to stir in their fellows a like spirit of enthusiasm.

152 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

One by one the others respond to the appeal, until all are dancing in a twisting, milling mass of yelling savages. When this point is reached the old women bring the weapons from the houses and the scene becomes one of the wildest, most barbaric imaginable. More wady is given the men, and they gradually muster up enough courage to take to the war-path.

This does not mean that they go boldly forth to attack their enemies; it means only that they have decided to have a feast the main attraction of which will be the bodies of as many victims as they can collect without undue risk to themselves. The procedure is to bedeck themselves in their finest fashion and visit a kampong remote from their own. They choose one which lies on the far side of one or two others with which they themselves are friendly. When they pass through these kampongs they tell their neighbors that they are going hunting and in no manner hint at their real errand.

Upon arrival at the kampong selected for their visit, they stroll in from the jungle as though

tired out from a not very successful hunting-excursion and, being hospitable, their hosts immediately prepare food and places for them to rest. Friendships are struck up and two or three days are loitered away while the lay of the land is being observed. Two or three victims—who live in shacks remote from the main houses of the village, as a rule—are selected, and the final plans are laid. One or two of the visiting tribe strike up a friendship with the victims and go with them to their shacks at night, ostensibly to gossip and sleep. A signal is arranged: the cry of a nightbird or a song by one of their own men, purposely awake and watching with some of his fellows by the fireside, is the usual indication that all is ready.

When the silence tells those on guard that their hosts are all asleep, the signal is given; the visitors who are feigning sleep rise cautiously and, with weapon ready, each suddenly awakens his intended victim. Aroused from a deep slumber, the poor fellow usually wakes with some sort of exclamation or cry. At the first word

154 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

spoken the stone-bitted war-club descends with terrible finality and the victim lapses into a slumber from which he never awakens. The deed is done quietly, with every precaution taken to guard against the awakening of the rest of the kampong. In many instances several small shacks have been erected for the convenience of the visitors and the victims are lured into these to be murdered.

Some of the girls of the place may take a liking to the visitors, in which case there may be one or two men and a like number of girls in the shacks of the strangers. The result is the same, and girls are highly prized, as Intelligence tells us that they are more tender than the men. In fact, he says that there is no morsel that equals the left shoulder-blade of a ten- or twelve-year-old girl. Immediately upon killing their victims, the visitors stealthily remove the bodies from the kampong, and in the concealing darkness of the jungle decapitate them. After trussing up the bodies upon bamboo poles for ease in carrying them, they depart in haste for

their own kampong, taking a circuitous route to avoid other kampongs between them and home.

The head of each victim is the property of him who delivered the fatal blow, and the murderer struts into his family circle very proud of his success. While the men were away the women have prepared the roasting-pit for the bodies that they know will be brought.

The pits in which the bodies are roasted are dug well away from the kampong as a rule, and are filled with alternate layers of wood and stones. By the time the wood is all burned away the stones are intensely hot, and they are kept so with a great fire built over them, until the warriors return. After all ornaments such as necklaces and bracelets have been removed, the bodies are placed in the pits without further preparation, upon bars of ironwood or some similar hardwood which keep them from actual contact with the red-hot stones, and covered with green palm-branches and a layer of earth to exclude the air.

When the roasting is completed, the time re-

156 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

quired being dependent upon the number of stones in a pit and the age of the victim, the pits are opened and the bodies eaten. The choicest pieces go to the men who have done the killing and the rest are divided equally among the remaining inhabitants of the village. All partake of the feast, from the youngest infant able to masticate solid food to the oldest member of the tribe. The dogs come in for their share and as a rule are given the bones to squabble over, though occasionally some of these are kept to be made into ornaments.

Intelligence tells us that one *bagoose laki laki* (good man) will satisfy the hunger of ten persons, but adds with a smile that it is better to have enough *babi panjang* (long pig) so that one body need be divided among only five or six. All the flesh is consumed at one sitting and after the feast is over the place is usually cleaned up and the pits covered carefully with earth and brush to hide the evidence of guilt, for the feasters are sure that sooner or later they will be visited by members of other kampongs who are



Under the influence of the wady, exhilarated by the wild dance,
the men finally take part



They again threaten the men with total exclusion from all inter-
course with their families

curious to learn whether or not they know anything of the disappearance of certain people of Kampong Sangase or Watambi, or whatever the name may be.

With the coming of dawn in the kampong the hunting-party visited, there is weeping and wailing when the absence of the visitors together with their victims is discovered. The men vow vengeance and make a warlike showing, and even venture a short distance into the jungle, where they gather and discuss the situation. They will remain there a while and upon returning to the kampong they will tell wild tales of how they chased their visitors many miles but could not overtake them.

The matter, by reason of their cowardice and utter inability to bring themselves to engage in open warfare, finally passes into the limbo of forgotten things, although in time some of their bravest may go on a round of a few kampongs to see if anything can be learned regarding the tribe responsible for the outrage. If they identify the guilty tribe, they may lie in ambush for

158 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

some lone member hunting in the neighborhood of his own kampong and murder him. This is the most common course followed in reprisal. In fact, a large percentage of the cannibal feasts are thus inspired.

Absorbed in the chase of wild pig or other game, the hunter often enters the preserves of another tribe, and if he is discovered he more often than not disappears. It is for this reason that the men hunt only when driven to it by the women or when game is plentiful within reasonable distance of their own village.

We ask Intelligence the reason for waking the victim up before killing him rather than simply striking him while asleep. For a moment he ponders, for putting things so that we can understand him taxes his powers of narration. He finally makes us understand that the purpose is to obtain a name for the next male child born in the hunting-party's kampong, for the first word spoken is bestowed on the infant. Intelligence himself was named in that manner, he tells us. His Kia Kia name is Geki. He promises to

show us the skull of the unfortunate man who supplied it. Probably the "namee" falls heir to the skull of the man responsible for the christening, though this is only conjecture on our part.

CHAPTER XIII

A KANGAROO HUNT

THE men of the kampong are planning a kangaroo hunt in the lowlands not far distant from the kampong. They say the hunt will take two days and that if we wish to go with them it will be necessary to make provision ourselves for our food and shelter. They, of course, sleep in rude palm-leaf lean-tos and subsist on their staple sago cake. The prospect of witnessing a kangaroo drive fills us with enthusiasm, and with all speed we prepare to accompany them. Early the next morning we set out with a light outfit and enough food for two days. By dint of much coaxing and promises of much tobacco we have persuaded three of the young men of the tribe to carry our *barang*.

The way leads up the coast for about ten miles



This man confessed to having eaten many human beings. To estimate the number accurately was beyond his power of reckoning



The sharp edged stone war club in the hands of such men as these makes quick work of a victim

and thence into the jungle through swampy tangles of tapa grass to a point three miles from the ocean. Here we strike camp, and after a hurried meal the hunters go out to reconnoiter. There are kangaroos in the vicinity; in the course of our hike into the swampy region we see several of the timid creatures, which turn at sight of us and bound away to the protection of the thickets. They are a very small variety of kangaroo and not at all like the giant bush animal of Australia. The kangaroos of New Guinea seldom reach a height of over three feet when standing erect.

About seventy of the natives have come to participate in the hunt and these soon take to the jungle, where they make their way silently to points which form a semicircle a mile in radius. The center of this half-circle is a swamp where the water is a foot or so in depth and the rushes scarce. It is to this place the natives will drive the little animals when the hunt begins in the morning.

With the earliest signs of dawn the men are

162 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

up and stirring. A hasty breakfast concluded, they spread out and start slowly toward the swamp, beating the brush and thickets with flails and at the same time shouting at the top of their voices. In this manner they slowly drive the game before them, though at first the jungle seems to be deserted, so wary are the animals.

As the men advance and the circle closes up we see now and then swift-moving dun-colored objects bounding ahead of us through the half-light of the jungle. The men on the right and left of us nod their satisfaction, for there seems to be a good-sized herd of kangaroos enclosed in the converging human trap. Now and then one of the animals tries to break through the line, but it is almost invariably headed off and driven back into the thickets ahead.

The men, as the line approaches the swamp, are scarcely six yards apart and within this close-drawn ring are nearly a hundred of the animals. The ground has become increasingly marshy, and soon we are wading ankle-deep in water. As we break through the last thicket the open

swamp is disclosed to view. Here an exciting scene greets our eyes.

Entirely surrounded by a cordon of naked, yelling savages are a hundred kangaroos leaping and bounding here and there in the swamp, trying to escape the advancing line of men. Their splashing is prodigious, and because of their leaping this way and that there seem to be many more of them than there really are. Their frightened little cries appeal to our sympathies and we drop out of the line, not caring to engage in the coming slaughter.

The Kia Kias soon get within striking-distance and in a very short time the excitement is over. Many of the animals escape, much to our satisfaction, but when the toll of the hunt is taken there are sixty of them stretched out on a strip of dry ground which caps a low rise beside the swamp. The natives are wild with joy at their success, for they tell us that in their last drive they succeeded in catching only twelve animals.

Grasping the kangaroos by their powerful

hind legs and carrying them dangling down their backs from the shoulders, the natives set out on the return to the kampong. Unaccustomed to the bearing of burdens, they stop for rest frequently and it is late in the afternoon when we enter the kampong. Here the women greet us with great joy, for their stomachs will be full for a long time to come. While immediate preparations are made for roasting some of the animals, the men prepare to cure the remainder by drying and smoking them.

Strangely enough, there is no attempt to save or cure the skins, and when we question the savages regarding this, they shake their heads. They have no use for them, they say, and let it go at that. Wearing no clothes, they do not require the skins for bodily covering and the only use they have for leather is for covering the heads of their drums, for which purpose they invariably use pigskin. A few of the women save narrow strips of the hide, from which they will make the seed-decorated bandoleers that some of them affect, but this is the only use to

which they seem to put the skin of the kangaroo. Yet, properly tanned, it would make admirable leather, for it is as soft as kid.

The dogs make short work of the many skins, eating them hair and all and disgorging the balled-up hair later. The men save some of the leg bones, from which they make nose ornaments, but in the main the dogs get these also. It is surprising how the dogs fatten up after one of these feasts. Between feasts one can count every rib and the poor creatures are so gaunt that it would seem an act of mercy to put them out of their misery. Nature never intended dogs to exist on a diet consisting mainly of coconut. After a feast, however, the dogs drag themselves around with stomachs bulging. In a few days, and until the bones and meat are quite gone, their hair is sleek and shiny and in contrast to their former appearance they are positively fat.

The men and women gorge themselves exactly as the dogs do, with the result that there is little activity in the kampong until the meat is entirely

consumed. They then fall back on their staple diet until such time as the women can prevail upon the men to go on another excursion.

The natives generously offer us two of the kangaroos to vary our diet of tinned goods, but the little animals seem so much like things to be petted rather than eaten that we thank our hosts warmly and tell them that, inasmuch as we have plenty of our own kind of food and they have so little, we could not think of taking their meat from them. The excuse passes muster with them and they do not press the matter, much to our satisfaction; for at times it becomes awkward to explain certain things which to us are a matter of course.

CHAPTER XIV

THE BIRD OF PARADISE

SHORTLY after the kangaroo hunt there come to the kampong two Chinese, with a party of Moresby boys, who are making their way to the coast and Merauke, where they can dispose of the skins of the birds of paradise they have taken. The Chinese are of the typical trader class and appear prosperous, for their watch-chains are very heavy and of pure gold,—not the red gold we know, but the twenty-two-karat metal of the Orient.

Their advent causes a stir in the kampong, for the moment the dogs give warning of the approach of strangers the natives all dive into the shacks, to peer furtively through the crevices until assured the visitors mean them no harm. The Chinese enter the kampong boldly and, espying our camp, come to greet us immediately; and

as the Chinaman is always hail fellow well met, we invite the men in and give them a cup of tea. Moh is most happy to serve them and beams upon them as he passes the tea.

They seem much surprised to find two white men here and question us regarding the purpose of our visit, thinking at first, doubtless, that we are on the same errand as they. They cannot comprehend how we two Americans can find recreation and amusement in coming to this God-forsaken spot, putting up with untold hardship and inconvenience merely to meet and study the lives of the Kia Kia savages. The Chinese is first, last, and always a business man and bends all his energies toward succeeding in his business. The Moresby boys immediately take up their abode with Ula and the crew of the *Nautilus*, who are camped near the kampong, and we make the Chinese comfortable in a spare tent, where they spread their mats and prepare to stay a day or two to rest.

They have been successful in their hunting and have nearly sixty codies, or twelve hundred of

the skins, though they have been in the interior only since last May. The skins, well preserved in arsenic, are done up in parcels. There is a small fortune in the proceeds of their season's hunting and they are most happy at their success, though they of course do not boast of it. It is not the Chinaman's way to wax exuberant over anything. Win or lose, his face never changes expression.

In the course of the evening our visitors tell us in perfect Malay—they speak only a word or two of English—of the manner of hunting their beautiful quarry. The habits of the birds are most interesting. They also tell us something which is news to us. We had supposed that the restrictions placed upon the importation of the skins into America were due to the possibility of the species becoming extinct, but the hunters tell us that this is not the case. They say that only the male birds in full plumage are taken and that the bird never attains his fullest plumage until after the second bird-mating season. This being the case, it would seem that there is no danger of

extinction, and the Chinese seemed to think that the ruling was unjust.

The method of hunting the birds is odd and requires much patience. When the locality they frequent is located, search is made for the dancing-tree. This is usually an immense bare-limbed tree that towers above the surrounding jungle. When such a tree is found it is watched for several mornings to see if the birds come to it, and if this is the case, a blind is constructed well up in its branches where the hunters can hide from the sight of the birds but are within easy bow-shot of them. Two bowmen will ascend to this masking shelter, two or three hours before dawn, and lie in wait for the birds that they know will come with the first rays of the rising sun.

The trees surrounding the large one fill with female birds, come to witness the dancing of the males who strut and dance on the bare branches of the large tree. The hunters lie in wait in their blind until the tree is literally filled with the gorgeous male birds.

The birds become so engrossed in their strut-

ting and vain showing-off to the females that the hunters are able to shoot them down one by one with the blunt arrows used for this purpose. The large round ends of the arrows merely stun the birds, which fall to the ground and are picked up by men below.

Frequently the hunters are able to kill two thirds of the birds before the others take alarm and fly away. The skins, as they are gathered, are washed in arsenic soap and packed away in bundles of twenty. The washing shrinks a skin so that the true proportions of the bird are lost: the head is large in relation to the rest of the body, but with the removal of the skull it shrinks to such an extent that it seems to be exceedingly small.

The skin is taken for the gorgeous plumes which spring from the side of the bird and are seen on the live bird only when he is strutting or in flight. It is a matter of interest that the nests of the birds, and consequently their eggs, are never found, and large prices have been offered for a specimen of each. Among the hunters

172 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

there seems to be a general belief that only one bird is reared at a time, though this is only conjecture.

On the morrow the hunters gather some surf-fish as a welcome change in their diet and, after smoking these a little and drying them after the Chinese fashion, depart on the last long leg of their trip to Merauke. We tell them in response to their invitation to accompany them that we are quite content here and will await the coming of the next trading Malay who happens along. The trip through the jungle with our multitudinous effects offers no inducements to us.

CHAPTER XV

THE COMING OF THE BURONG MAS

KAMPONG days melt into one another with such indolent smoothness that the weeks slide into months without tally. Were it not for the calendar that hangs on the wall of the tent our count of them would be entirely lost. The simple routine life of the natives of the kampong, except for the diversions we have seen, becomes monotonous and boredom grips us.

It is a week since our yellow brethren left us with much ado and genial wishes for our welfare. They are well on their way by this time. Some of our own boys from the *Nautilus* accompanied them, for they had through some misdeeds become *persona non grata* with our hosts. On the beach there is a heavy surf rolling, for some distant storm at sea has raised a great swell, and

dozens of Medusæ and other ocean polyyps have been thrown up by the waves, to die in the fierce rays of the sun.

While we are walking along beside the thundering surf inspecting these,—a sort of natural-history lesson for want of more engrossing occupation,—a glance seaward gives us a thrill. Far out upon the horizon, almost hull down, is a schooner. It seems to be headed in our direction. She is the first sign of life we have seen at sea since our arrival here, and our minds are instantly filled with conjecture as to her destination. “Will she touch here?” we ask each other.

We hasten back to the kampong to tell the natives of the schooner and also to see if they know anything about her. She may be, we think, a boat that customarily touches at this place to trade. Upon seeing the schooner, which is momentarily drawing nearer, the natives chatter excitedly, finally making us understand that she will not come here, but will undoubtedly touch at a kampong farther up the coast where much copra or dried cocoanut meat, purchased

COMING OF THE BURONG MAS 175

from the natives with trade tobacco, will be taken on. The schooner is tacking and, even as we watch, takes a slant across the wind. The other kampong is fifteen miles to the westward. If we can get there in time to intercept the schooner before she has taken on her cargo and left, there is a good chance that we can get back to Merauke on her and catch the steamer to Java.

A steamer is due to leave Merauke for civilization in four days, according to our calendar. There is no time to lose. Instantly we make up our minds to take that schooner back. This will necessitate our packing up our equipment immediately and transporting it fifteen miles in the broiling heat of midday, plowing through the soft beach sand. It is a large order to undertake in the tropics. When we tell the natives of our decision they shake their heads gravely and say it cannot be done.

However, we strike camp in a jiffy and soon have our equipment snugly done up in thirty-and forty-pound bundles. The next problem is to secure the assistance of the natives, for with-

176 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

out their aid the trip will be impossible. At first they are most unwilling to accompany us, but when we tell them that they are going whether they like it or not, and make a show of becoming nasty, they decide not to arouse our anger and gather round to load the bundles on their backs. Each tries to select the lightest of the bundles, and there ensues a great squabble among them. There are nearly sixty pieces of barang to be carried, and of course this requires a like number of men. We settle the squabble by telling all the men to take their bundles to a clear place on the sand and lay them down. When they have done this, we line them up and pick out the strongest-looking of them to carry the heavier pieces, so that the weaker and the very old ones will not be overburdened. It is not alone a sense of justice that prompts us in this, though, for were we to overload the weaker ones they would lag behind the rest and thus delay our march.

Before going we distribute part of our remaining tobacco among the women, who have come

to like us and appear sad over our sudden leave-taking. The rest we will give to our carriers when they leave us at the other kampong. With one of us white men in the lead to set the pace and the other bringing up the rear to spur on the laggards, we hasten away at a pace that soon starts the perspiration in streams. Moh walks along in the middle of the procession, happier than he has been since leaving Java. He has visions of his lady-love in Soerabaya greeting him with outstretched arms. He feels sure of her fidelity; for does she not know that he is well paid by the Tuans, and that his pockets will be well lined with guilders?

The remaining crew of the *Nautilus* also come with us, and are rather useful, for they proudly tote our guns. They, too, are happy, as they are anxious to return to their homes. Abreast of us is the schooner, still tacking up the coast. It seems at first as though she were slowly crawling ahead of us, but as the hours drag on we see that we are holding our own, and we even stop once for refreshment and to rest the weary

178 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

natives, who are beginning to show signs of playing out. Some of them stagger a little as they come to a halt where we are piling the barang.

After the period of rest is over they shoulder their burdens and the long file is again under way. The sky becomes overcast when we are on the last four-mile stretch and still an hour from our destination. We welcome the cloudiness, for the heat has been terrific. With the clouds comes a rain-storm which soaks us to the skin, but which washes off the perspiration and is gratefully cooling. Once our spirits fall as we near the kampong. The schooner tacks again, which seems to indicate that she is going out to sea and does not intend touching at the place at all. There is excited comment from the natives at this and we indulge in a little soul-satisfying invective, until we see that the manœuver is simply to enable the boat to pass a mud-bar over which the tide is breaking. As the schooner swerves and heads directly for the village, we cheer loudly and urge the lagging Kia Kias to

greater speed, that we may arrive at the place ahead of her dinghy.

We just make it, for the men drop their burdens as the crew of the schooner land through the surf. We go forward to meet the skipper of the craft and find him to be a Chinese who greets us affably. To our inquiry if he intends returning to Merauke he replies that he will after loading on five piculs of copra. We tell him that we wish to return with him and he looks at our pile of barang and shakes his head. After a little mental calculation he says that he cannot accommodate us unless we wish to leave some of our belongings for a later trip. At this we firmly shake our heads, and we finally strike a bargain by chartering his whole schooner for ourselves. The copra he leaves for a later trip.

We tell him that we must be in Merauke in time to catch the steamer for Java. Again he shakes his head and with a glance at the sky says, "*Angin tida baik* [The wind is not good.]" While this conversation has been under way, our

bearers have cast themselves wearily down upon the sand, and as the natives of the kampong drift down to the beach they rise and try to slink away to the village, where they can hide from further work. Moh calls our attention to this just in time, and we order them back to their burdens. The schooner is lying about three hundred yards from the high-tide mark and with the receding tide is canting slowly on her side. She is aground in the mud of the river mouth.

The best way to load her with our barang is to have the men wade out and put the stuff directly on her. This they do after some remonstrance, and then our work is over. Tired out from the long hike in the heat, we go aboard immediately and change to dry, clean clothes while Moh prepares our dinner. The Kia Kias receive the remaining tobacco, five packages each, with cries of glad surprise, and it touches us to hear them singing to us while, tired as they are, they dance farewell to us up and down the beach. With all their faults, they have hearts and can

come truly to like one who treats them with consideration and kindness.

High tide is at eleven, the skipper tells us, and we must of necessity wait for it. The crew are all on shore, visiting in the kampong, from which there drifts to us the sound of merry-making. A thump now and then warns us of the incoming tide, and soon the schooner's decks begin to level up as she straightens to an even keel. At half-past ten o'clock the skipper comes aboard with the crew and preparations are made for getting under way. The skipper is a jolly fellow with a rotund countenance beaming with good nature mixed with shrewdness that speaks of his business ability. He has driven a hard bargain with us for the charter, he thinks, but could he but know it, we would have paid him double without rancor. In fact, we offer a prize or bonus for himself and the crew if they land us in Merauke in time to catch our steamer.

The kampong is in utter darkness when we finally weigh anchor and glide out from the

182 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

shadow of the point beneath which it nestles. Only the mournful howling of a dog bids us farewell, for the natives have all turned in. There is a fair breeze, and with low contented murmurings the wavelets lap the cutwater of the schooner.

Morning dawns on a glassy sea. There is not a breath of air stirring. The sails hang motionless. The hours speed by with no change in the motion of the schooner. As the situation begins to get on our nerves and we contemplate a two-months' stretch in Merauke, we anxiously question the skipper as to the probability of the calm enduring. He gives us little hope and we descend to the depths of gloom. The crew are gathered up forward around the typical sheet-iron fireplace, cooking rice and fish. When they have finished their meal one of them worms his way below and emerges later with a large gong. He is about to call the attention of the wind spirits to our plight and beseech them to favor us so that the bonus can be collected. He beats the gong briskly and chants

an invocation in Malay, while the rest of the crew add their prayers to his. We look upon the proceeding with cynical indifference, but, much to our surprise, even while the men are still chanting and the gong booming, a cool breath fans our faces and the sail above us bellies out tentatively. At this the crew redouble their efforts and soon a spanking breeze is sending us slithering through the surges in fine style.

The crew look at us with great pride in their gods, and an expression of, "Your gods cannot do that." It is a coincidence, we tell ourselves, but underlying our skepticism is a lurking wonder if after all there is not something in their faith. Only once on the voyage to Merauke does the breeze lessen. As the sails flap in the falling breeze, the gong and the chant are again brought to the fore, with instant results. The thing is a little uncanny and the skipper assures us that when they are beset with danger, in a storm, they call to the spirits in the same way and always with the desired results.

At noon of the second day out we espy ahead

184 THE ISLE OF VANISHING MEN

the great red buoy that marks the channel within the river of Merauke. As we turn the point to enter the broad river a welcome sight greets us. Our steamer is just coming abreast of the town, having arrived a few hours ahead of time. To-night we shall sleep in a snow-white state-room,—between clean sheets.

THE END

UNIVERSITY OF
LIBRARY

LOS ANGELES
UNIVERSITY

LOS ANGELES
UNIVERSITY

LIBRARY

LIBRARY

LIBRARY

LIBRARY

UC SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA 000 996 134 3

